

# NEIGHBORHOODS NOW 2020–21 Updates

**VAN  
ALEN  
INSTITUTE**



July 22, 2021

A collaboration between the **Urban Design Forum** and **Van Alen Institute, *Neighborhoods Now*** connects New York City neighborhoods hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic with design firms in our collective network. Since May 2020, *Neighborhoods Now* has provided support to hundreds of restaurants, small businesses, and cultural organizations in hard-hit neighborhoods across New York City.

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# *Neighborhoods Now* emerged from a spirit of support for our neighbors in a difficult time and the understanding that **equity is rooted in our physical environment.**

As the COVID-19 pandemic took root, its uneven impact on the lives of New Yorkers became painfully clear. While our city's well-resourced communities quickly purchased expertise necessary to navigate a changed world, neighborhoods where many of our essential workers live did not have the same access and resources.

In response, the Urban Design Forum and Van Alen Institute tapped into our collective network of architects, designers and engineers. By building interdisciplinary partnerships, *Neighborhoods Now* supports local organizations leading their communities' recovery. To date, we mobilized more than 85 firms to support recovery efforts in New York City's hard-hit neighborhoods.

What began as a responsive six-week sprint developed into a year-long neighborhood recovery initiative. Urban Design Forum and Van Alen Institute partnered with local organizations to direct resources and technical assistance to small businesses and cultural organizations. Our community partners are at the heart of this work. We are honored to support their heroic efforts to implement on-the-ground solutions to urgent pandemic-related challenges in the context of the existing deep inequities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Our initial teams convened in summer 2020, and nearly all continue to collaborate beyond their initial scope. Physical interventions like outdoor seating for restaurants and safety

barriers for small businesses were just some outcomes. Over the past year, working groups have also organized financial workshops for small businesses, drafted legal templates, and collaborated with senior staff at City agencies to help neighborhoods navigate municipal programs like Open Streets and Open Restaurants. Teams are now embedded in neighborhoods and advancing plans for recovery on a wider community scale.

Ultimately, equity is rooted in our physical environment. Without equitable access to resources needed to care for spaces that support the civic and economic well-being of communities – and to adapt them in times of crisis – long-term structural inequities will endure.

Every New Yorker should have equitable access to design resources that support community needs. To advance toward this goal, the *Neighborhoods Now* team listened humbly to our community partners, and worked to deepen partnerships between the design community and community development organizations. This report details what we have learned this last year, what worked and what challenges remain. The Urban Design Forum and Van Alen Institute are committed to continuing this work beyond the pandemic. We hope you'll join us.

**Deborah Marton**

Executive Director, Van Alen Institute

**Daniel McPhee**

Executive Director, Urban Design Forum





The South Bronx team hosts a community lot clean-up day on East 163rd Street.  
Photo: Banana Kelly



# BY THE NUMBERS

## ABOUT OUR *NEIGHBORHOODS NOW* PARTICIPANTS:

**479** small businesses and organizations impacted

All with an annual gross revenue under **\$1 million**; majority less than **\$500K**

**11** community partners based in **4** boroughs

**200+** interdisciplinary professionals across **85** firms

**\$2.7 million** value in pro bono services provided

**\$195,000** regranted to community partners for implementation

## ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE WE WORK:

**69.9%-95.2%** of residents are Asian, Black, and/or Latinx

**\$34,920-\$62,230** average median income





People dance at the outdoor opening of Tropical Rotisserie Chicken in Kingsbridge, Bronx. In collaboration with Felix and Dexter Ciprian, Design Advocates and NWBCCC provided the restaurant with outdoor seating.

Photo: Cameron Blaylock



# COMMUNITY-BASED WORKING GROUPS

<b>BED-STUY, BROOKLYN</b>	
<b>Community lead:</b> Bedford-Stuyvesant Gateway BID	<b>Team:</b> Design Advocates, Grimshaw, Jaklitsch/ Gardner, Moody Nolan, W Architecture
<b>Community lead:</b> Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation	<b>Team:</b> AE Superlab, Farzana Gandhi Design Studio, James Corner Field Operations, JB&B, KPF
<b>CHINATOWN, MANHATTAN</b>	
<b>Community leads:</b> Asian Americans for Equality and Think!Chinatown	<b>Team:</b> Buro Happold, di Domenico + Partners, Fried Frank, Leroy Street Studio
<b>LOWER EAST SIDE, MANHATTAN</b>	
<b>Community lead:</b> Fourth Arts Block	<b>Team:</b> Buro Happold, DLR Group, FCA, Henning Larsen, Marvel, SHoP
<b>Community lead:</b> Cooper Square Committee	<b>Team:</b> Curtis + Ginsberg Architects
<b>JACKSON HEIGHTS, QUEENS</b>	
<b>Community lead:</b> 82nd Street BID	<b>Team:</b> ARO, Design Advocates, LTL, MOS, nARCHITECTS, SO-IL, VHB
<b>KINGSBRIDGE, BRONX</b>	
<b>Community lead:</b> Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition	<b>Team:</b> COOKFOX, Design Advocates, MNLA, Perkins & Will, Scalar Architecture, Studio Libeskind
<b>Community lead:</b> University Neighborhood Housing Program	<b>Team:</b> Dattner Architects, MBB
<b>SOUTH BRONX</b>	
<b>Community lead:</b> Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association	<b>Team:</b> BD Feliz, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, The Greenest Fern
<b>WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, MANHATTAN</b>	
<b>Community lead:</b> Community League of the Heights (CLOTH)	<b>Team:</b> Arup, Design Advocates, Gensler, Stantec, Woods Bagot

**Kingsbridge**

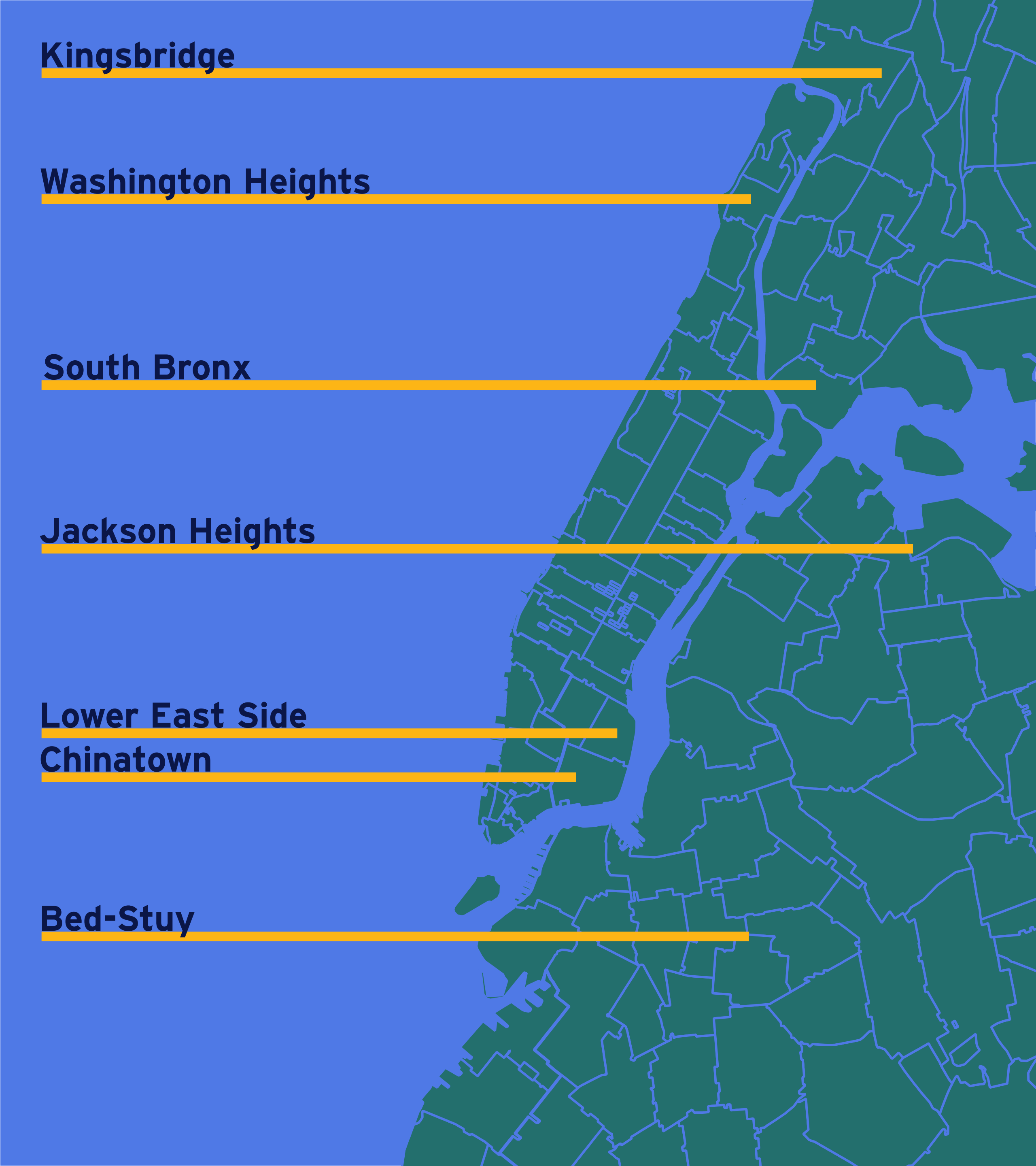
**Washington Heights**

**South Bronx**

**Jackson Heights**

**Lower East Side  
Chinatown**

**Bed-Stuy**



# CITYWIDE EXPERTS

**We are tremendously grateful for the opportunity to work with committed organizations and talented design professionals in addressing the current challenges faced by local businesses and the communities they serve.** We seek to bring our legal lens to the multi-disciplinary team that Van Alen Institute and the Urban Design Forum have assembled for this exciting effort.

**Carol Rosenthal**  
Partner, Fried Frank

In addition to our neighborhood working groups, we thank this interdisciplinary group for joining *Neighborhoods Now* to provide expertise on an as-needed basis.

## **GRAPHICS**

- Partner & Partners
- Pentagram
- Two Twelve

## **HEAT AND RESILIENCY**

- Center for Resilient Cities and Landscapes, Columbia GSAPP

## **LAW**

- Fried Frank
- Kramer Levin

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- HR&A Advisors

## **ENGINEERING**

- Thornton Tomasetti
- Silman

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY**

- Evie Klein, CUNY Graduate Center
- Javier Otero Peña, CUNY Graduate Center

## **MATERIAL SCIENCE**

- Alison Mears, Healthy Materials Lab, Parsons School of Design

## **PUBLIC HEALTH**

- Luisa Borrell, Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy, CUNY
- Dustin Duncan, Columbia Mailman School of Public Health
- Gina Lovasi, Drexel University

## **SMALL BUSINESS LENDING**

- National Development Council

## **STREETSCAPE AND CURBSIDE MANAGEMENT**

- Sam Schwartz
- VHB

# NYC COLLABORATORS

New York City Department of City Planning

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

New York City Department of Small Business Services

New York City Department of Transportation

New York City Economic Development Corporation



# RESOURCE COLLABORATORS

The New York Community Trust is committed to change – both on the ground and systemic – that allows all New Yorkers to thrive, which is why we're proud to support *Neighborhoods Now*. By providing immediate design assistance to neighborhoods most affected by COVID-19, **Neighborhoods Now is a new model for how community leaders, nonprofits, city agencies, philanthropy, small businesses, and interdisciplinary experts can come together** to help neighborhood shops and restaurants recover and thrive.

**Patricia A. Swann**

Program Director, New York Community Trust

Small businesses are the beating heart of our communities. Just as we've supported struggling enterprises through PPP loans, we're honored to advance the work of *Neighborhoods Now*. **This initiative has really helped small businesses through design expertise and getting boots on the ground, and we're proud to see our communities pulling together to help each other.**

**Carlos Naudon**

President and CEO, Ponce Bank

Deutsche Bank is pleased to support *Neighborhoods Now*. Through a unique collaboration of teams of interdisciplinary experts, **Neighborhoods Now has had a profound impact on the small businesses and community partners critical to many New Yorkers.** *Neighborhoods Now* has proven that there's a lot we can accomplish by working together towards the common goal of supporting our neighbors.

**Lisa Talma**

Vice President, Deutsche Bank Community Development Finance Group

Special Support



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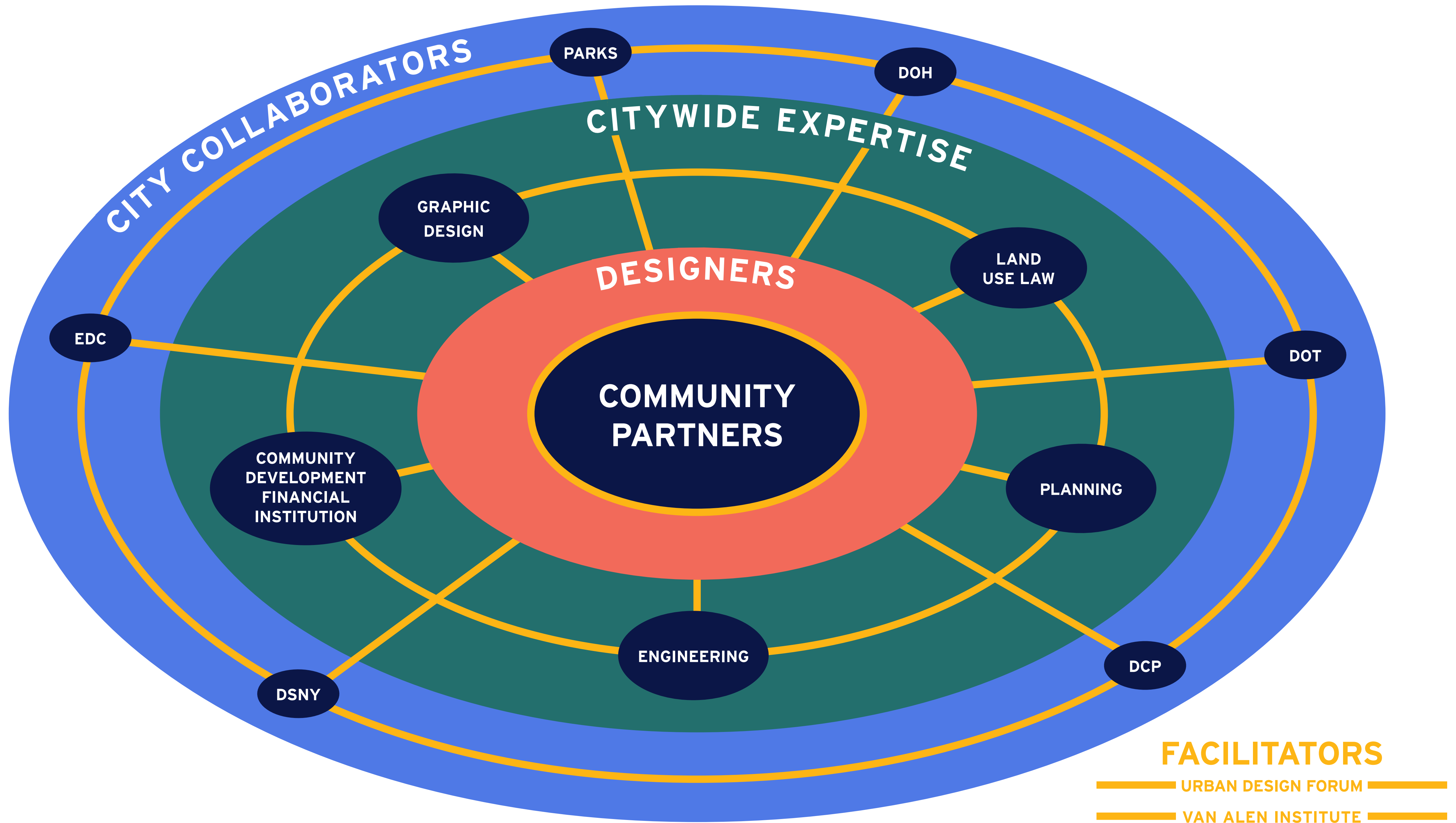


Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, James Corner Field Operations work to install new greenery around the Restoration plaza.  
Photo: Cameron Blaylock



# ORG CHART





# MEET THE TEAMS





# 82ND STREET BID

## JACKSON HEIGHTS, QUEENS

ARO, Design Advocates, LTL, MOS, nARCHITECTS, SO-IL, and VHB collaborated with the 82nd Street Partnership. Together, they helped over 20 restaurants participate in the city’s Open Restaurants program, and are continuing to support the neighborhood through exploration of new public plaza designs and usage of the Street Seats program. They are also looking toward the future with a pandemic-era reinvention of the beloved annual Viva La Comida festival.

### ABOUT 82ND STREET BID

The 82nd Street BID works to improve quality of life and support business growth by creating a cleaner, more welcoming and sustainable neighborhood for everyone. They achieve this through a range of local economic development programs, including neighborhood marketing, placemaking, streetscape beautification, supplemental sanitation, and advocacy.

*Neighborhoods Now* has brought equity to our community by providing direct assistance to the most needy small businesses and free planning services to our organization. **Without this initiative, it would have taken us years to do the work accomplished in just a few weeks.**

**Leslie Ramos**  
Executive Director, 82nd Street Partnership

**Top**  
The Jackson Heights team hosts a Paint and Plant event to pot plants along the main street and set up outdoor seating areas for restaurants in the neighborhood.  
Photo: Sam Lahoz





## 82ND STREET BID GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Open Restaurants:** The team aimed to address the immediate needs of the neighborhood's restaurants with proposals for responsive set-ups and shading along the street, ultimately helping over 20 businesses participate in the city's Open Restaurants program.
- **Community Building:** The team opened a field office to create an on-the-ground presence and pilot a model for temporary uses of vacant storefront space. The field office served as a hub to distribute information, goods, and services to businesses and individuals during the pandemic.
- **Open Space:** The team developed original designs to use parking and sidewalk lanes for public seating for three locations at Barco de Papel, Tulcingo, and Centro Mistico. At Libreria Barco de Papel – which serves not only as a bookstore, but as a community hub for cultural and political activity – the team supported additional strategies to shift programming and browsing to outside.
- **Neighborhood Beautification:** The team hosted multiple days dedicated to sprucing up the streetscape through new plants and fresh coats of colorful paint for benches in the area.
- **Viva La Comida:** Viva la Comida! is an annual festival highlighting the cultural diversity of Queens, combining food with music, art, dancing, entertainment and more on a street known for its outpouring of vibrancy. Even though the future is uncertain, the team worked to create parking and restaurant seating plans to accommodate the large gathering.



### Left + Bottom

The team works to add planters to the restaurant barriers using bungee cord and milk crates.

Photos: Sam Lahoz

### Right

Renderings of the seating pavilion and restaurant barriers planned for Jackson Heights.

Images: Design Advocates



# ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY + THINK!CHINATOWN

## CHINATOWN, MANHATTAN

Leroy Street Studio, di Domenico + Partners, and Buro Happold have partnered with Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE) and Think!Chinatown to develop a proposal to adapt Forsyth Plaza into an open-air market supporting local Chinatown businesses and cultural groups.

### ABOUT THINK!CHINATOWN

Think!Chinatown is an intergenerational nonprofit supporting what they love about Manhattan’s Chinatown. Through the arts, storytelling, and neighborhood engagement, they are here to listen, to respond, and to build Chinatown’s capacities as a strong and vibrant immigrant neighborhood of NYC.

### ABOUT ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY

Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE) is a non-profit organization based in New York City that has become one of the city’s leading housing, social service and community development organizations. AAFE strives for a more equitable city through research, advocacy and grassroots community organizing.

Asian Americans For Equality (AAFE) is thrilled to partner with Think!Chinatown under the *Neighborhoods Now* initiative to come up with creative, community-led solutions for Chinatown’s underutilized open spaces, with the twin goals of **helping our embattled small businesses and creating a more permanent cultural arts space for the community.**

Thomas Yu  
Co-Executive Director, AAFE

The team kicks off their Chinatown Nights series. This open-air festival featured programming alongside local street vendors.

Photo: Leroy Street Studio





# ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY + THINK!CHINATOWN

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Plan for Night Market:** The team set out to create the infrastructure to support a night market of food vendors along Forsyth Street and cultural programming on the adjacent plaza. To create more opportunities for neighborhood-specific cultural programming and a food market model, the team worked on financial mechanisms, marketing, design and construction of vending carts, and administration of regulations.
- **Pilot Event:** A monthly summer series, Chinatown Nights, kicked off on June 18, 2021. It was the pilot installment featuring a Chinatown-focused film program alongside local street vendors. On the cusp of NYC’s reopening, Chinatown Nights became much more than an open-air festival – it held space for the community to reunite and celebrate.
- **Neighborhood Beacon:** Glowing and playful, a movable light box hosts projections created by Think!Chinatown. As a signifier of a community event, the light box brings the party wherever it roams.
- **Community Engagement:** Think!Chinatown was able to connect a range of key stakeholders, growing the team to include artists, filmmakers and food vendors, while also introducing the team to some key Chinatown movers and shakers, inviting them into our design process. By connecting with these fixtures of the Chinatown cultural and social landscape, Chinatown Nights has been able to design a space where community members and visitors all feel welcome.
- **Future Plans:** The team is continuing to collaborate to develop staging techniques for more cultural performances and art vendors; expand the area of programming, activating more space along Forsyth Plaza; create a full night market model including permitting and financial model to host market stalls in addition to food vendors; and ensure the space is held for the Chinatown community by curating cultural programming appropriate for Chinatown aunties, culturally involved APIs, and visitors alike.

**Top**  
Chinatown community members  
gather for the first Chinatown Nights  
movie screening.  
Photo: di Domenico + Partners

**Bottom**  
A rendering of the multi-use pavilion  
on Forsyth Plaza.  
Image: di Domenico + Partners







## BANANA KELLY COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION SOUTH BRONX

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, The Greenest Fern, and BD Feliz joined Banana Kelly to reactivate community gardens in Longwood, Hunts Point, Morrisania, and Mott Haven, allowing for safe outdoor activities and services that address neighborhood needs.

### ABOUT BANANA KELLY

Banana Kelly serves the residents of the South Bronx, providing direct services to approximately 5,000 residents and support services to the community at large. While their affordable housing program is their major priority, they also balance their support services with opportunities for residents to define their own priorities and work towards their implementation.

**Top**  
Community members in the South Bronx clean up an empty lot on East 163rd Street to reactivate community gardens.  
Photo: Banana Kelly

In the South Bronx, community gardens are some of the most important assets we have in the fight against dire health disparities that unfairly burden the low-income communities of color we serve. **With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this fight is more important than ever**, which is why Banana Kelly is excited to participate in *Neighborhoods Now* to develop resident power by safely reactivating our garden spaces through infrastructure improvements and community organizing.

**Ian Gray-Stack**  
Director of Community Organizing, Banana Kelly





# BANANA KELLY COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Community Building:** The team collaborated with garden leaders and used *Neighborhoods Now* funding to hire youth organizers to become stewards and leaders in their communities and spur engagement of younger residents.
- **Community Garden Plans:** The team assessed five community gardens on Banana Kelly properties, which each presented unique opportunities and constraints. They created site-specific visions for each garden, plus toolkits that can be deployed across many sites. Visions range from the simple—such as turning readily available buckets into modular rolling garden beds—to complex, such as creating new and ADA-accessible access points that require negotiation with an adjacent property owner, now in progress.
- **Transformation and Activation:** Through an arrangement with New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development, Banana Kelly plans to acquire a vacant lot on East 163rd Street. Transformation and activation strategies ranged from rearranging garden bed layouts to dynamically fit real-time needs, to building kiosk structures for information sharing and sun protection.
- **Accessibility:** BD Feliz developed a series of vinyl stickers to optimize wayfinding and enhance gardens' visibility on the street. The markers can be easily installed or removed at a moment's notice to guide visitors to entrances and contribute to the greater garden identity.
- **Sustainability:** The Sustainability Index Plan (SIP), developed by The Greenest Fern, is a guide to facilitate the long-term planning of community gardens as well as the sustainable reporting and management of these spaces.



### Top

The community wall would allow residents and local shops to share events, resources, and news locally.

Image: BD Feliz

### Bottom

The team takes a tour of the various community gardens in the South Bronx during the early stages of the project.

Photo:  
Michael Van Valkenburg Associates



# BEDFORD-STUYVESANT RESTORATION CORPORATION

## BED-STUY, BROOKLYN

AE Superlab, Farzana Gandhi Design Studio, James Corner Field Operations, JB&B, and KPF collaborated with Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation to imagine Fulton Street as a major public space linking slow streets, existing plazas, and repurposed vacant lots and storefronts. The team is continuing to support interior reconfiguration strategies for the Restoration campus, and are exploring ways to aid broader neighborhood recovery efforts, including through small business training, wayfinding design, and public art.

### ABOUT RESTORATION

For more than 54 years, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation has worked to advance community development and racial equity. Today, their mission to disrupt the racial wealth gap influences every facet of our organization. They are on a quest to ensure every Central Brooklynite has the tools and opportunities to live a thriving, equitable life.



**For us, the *Neighborhoods Now* project has provided an extraordinary opportunity to serve our city at a critical time.** Working closely with Restoration to help the Bed-Stuy community to stay functional in this COVID period has been both productive and faith-inspiring. I hope this work will open up doors for us all to be more engaged in the future.

**James von Klemperer**  
President, KPF

Restoration, James Corner Field Operations work to install new greenery around the Restoration plaza.  
Photo: Cameron Blaylock



# BEDFORD STUYVESANT RESTORATION CORPORATION

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Posters and Wayfinding:** Working with Partner & Partners, the team provided signage indicating social distancing protocols and circulation recommendations with clear and consistent graphics and language for distribution throughout the Restoration buildings. Pamphlets designed by the team were printed and distributed to staff and the community.
- **Small Business Workshop:** The team hosted a virtual small business workshop open to the community to disseminate best practices and opportunities for indoor and outdoor dining and retail, along with NYC’s Open Streets portal. They also introduced their Be A Good Neighbor program that proposes swapping sidewalk rights.
- **Office Safety:** The team provided layout recommendations for Restoration’s Tax Preparation Center to accommodate clients who required in-person services and recommendations on air purifiers and DIY ventilation strategies.
- **Open Space:** The team sourced pro bono materials to install planters in Restoration Plaza and proposed an Adopt-a-Wall program for residents to create art for the plaza.



**Top**  
The initial phase of the Adopt-a-square murals was implemented during the Community Build Days in Fall 2020 where 6'x 6' square frames were painted on the ground.

**Bottom Left**  
Instructional demonstration for the construction of the planter barriers was hosted during the community build day at Restoration Plaza.

**Bottom Right**  
Rendering of a sustainable Black Lives Matter memorial on Fulton Street.  
Image: Moody Nolan



# BED-STUY GATEWAY BID

## BED-STUY, BROOKLYN

Design Advocates, Grimshaw, Jaklitsch/Gardner, Moody Nolan, and W Architecture collaborated with the Bed-Stuy Gateway BID. The working group helped launch the BID’s first ever Winter Wonderland to activate Marcy Plaza as a small business marketplace and hub for community gathering. The team has also taken on multiple short-term projects to aid some of the neighborhood’s most urgent needs during the pandemic.

### ABOUT BED-STUY GATEWAY BID

The Bed-Stuy Gateway BID, located in central Brooklyn, is one of Brooklyn’s most prominent commercial and cultural focal points. They represent a growing, eclectic community of entrepreneurs, nonprofit and arts organizations, families, artists, advocates who are proud to call Bedford-Stuyvesant home. Since 2009, they have partnered with their neighbors and stakeholders to enrich their community through economic development while promoting cultural diversity.

The team hosts a Winter Wonderland pop-up outdoor holiday market at Bed-Stuy’s Marcy Plaza, featuring local businesses, a toy drive, and free COVID-19 testing.

Photo: Cameron Blaylock



Community safety is our number one priority. Partnering with Van Alen Institute and Urban Design Forum’s team of designers has allowed the BID to create a socially distanced, cultural, safe experience to celebrate and support businesses within our district.

**Lynette Battle**  
Interim Executive Director, Bed-Stuy Gateway BID





## BED-STUY GATEWAY BID GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Small Business Support:** In December 2020, the team collaborated to host an outdoor, socially-distanced, pop-up winter marketplace to usher in the holiday season and provide much-needed visibility for Bed-Stuy's local businesses. Located at Marcy Plaza, the family-friendly Winter Wonderland also included socially-distanced Santa photos, gift-wrapping station, and surprise performances. The team also provided small businesses with tailored design assistance, including safe reopening layout and plexiglass designs for a local barbershop.
- **Mediation Workshop:** In March 2021, the team hosted a Tenant Landlord Mediation Clinic to support resolving leasing disputes brought on by COVID-19, led by Fried Frank and Alloy Development.
- **Rat Mitigation:** In response to a rat problem affecting the neighborhood's hygiene and business operations, the team put together a comprehensive set of mitigation recommendations. These rang from best practices for business owners to large-scale cleanup and renovation efforts of several vacant lots.
- **Ideas for Fulton Street:** In order to accommodate a Black Lives Matter memorial that would allow Fulton Street to remain open, the team worked with Moody Nolan to propose a more sustainable memorial. The proposal extends the graphic language across Fulton, linking Restoration Plaza with Marcy Plaza, while using vertical surfaces on either side to project graphics visible along Fulton Street.



**Top**  
People shop for holiday items at the Marcy Plaza Winter Wonderland.  
Photo: Cameron Blaylock

**Bottom**  
Rendering of a proposed shopping and dining kit of parts for the Marcy Plaza.  
Image: Moody Nolan



# COMMUNITY LEAGUE OF THE HEIGHTS (CLOTH)

## WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, MANHATTAN

Arup, Design Advocates, Gensler, Stantec, and Woods Bagot collaborated with CLOTH. Together, they proposed all-weather outdoor dining design, flexible outdoor retail displays, and a “kit-of-parts” for outdoor education, including for Word Up Community Bookshop’s programming. The working group has installed one of their outdoor dining prototypes, and is connecting with additional businesses in the neighborhood who could use pop-up spaces through flyering.

### ABOUT CLOTH

The Community League of the Heights (CLOTH) is a multi-service, community development organization dedicated to supporting and empowering the economically disadvantaged residents of Washington Heights. CLOTH’s holistic approach to community development provides a comprehensive framework of social and neighborhood services to stabilize and strengthen family life.

The Washington Heights small business community faces multiple challenges. With the expertise of the *Neighborhoods Now* team, we were able to address some of these challenges with practical, cost effective solutions. We are truly grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with such talented architects and designers. Their commitment to safe reopenings and eye for detail is second to none.

**Yvonne Stennett**  
Executive Director, Community League of the Heights



Outdoor dining prototype installed outside of Salento Colombian Coffee & Kitchen.

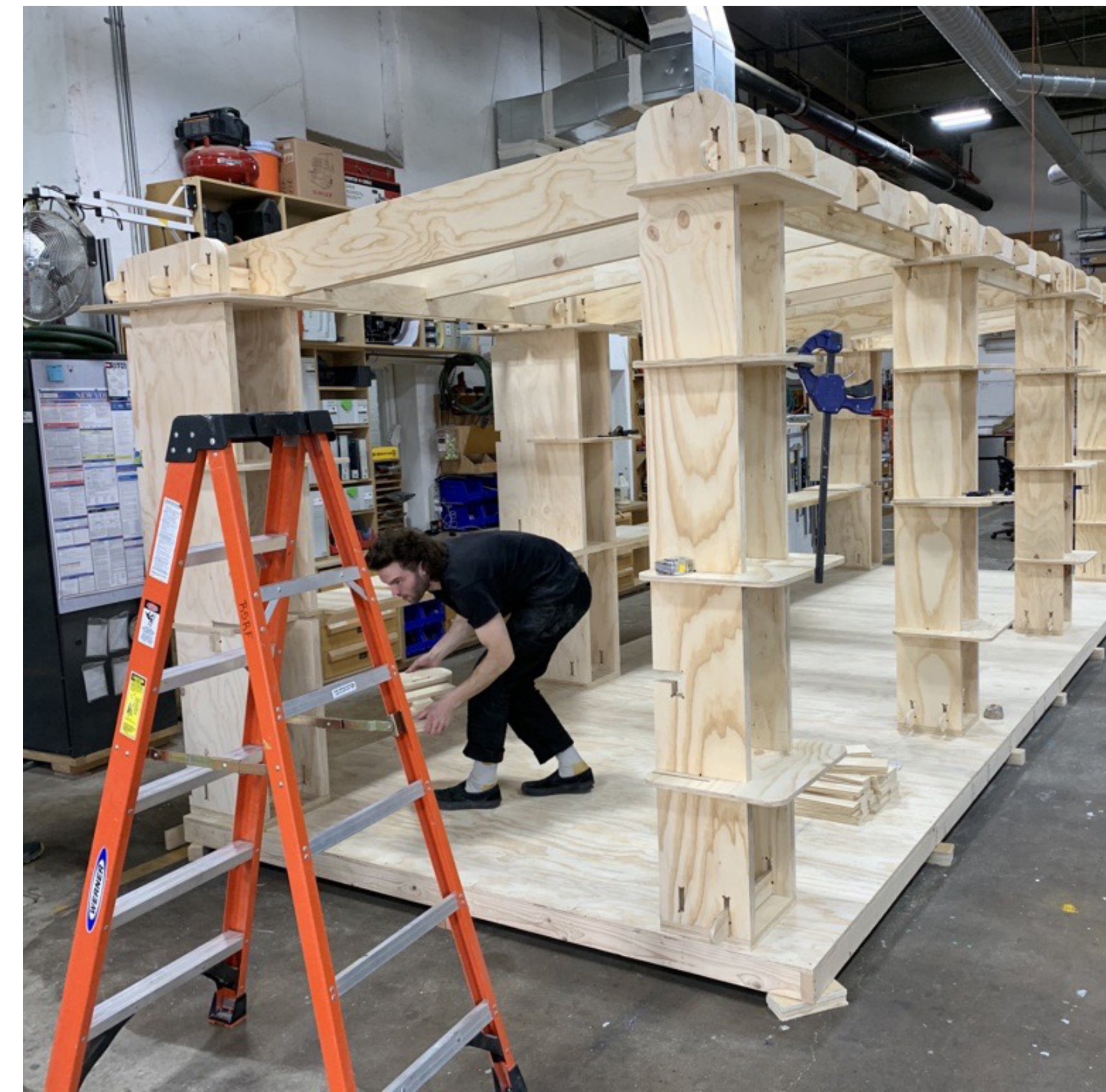
Photo: Woods Bagot



# COMMUNITY LEAGUE OF THE HEIGHTS (CLOTH)

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Return to School Logistics:** Arup worked to evaluate potential options for managing socially-distanced student entry into the school. These studies addressed high level requirements for social distancing and use of external spaces to manage and process queues for students.
- **Open Restaurant Seating:** Woods Bagot worked with Salento Colombian Coffee & Kitchen to implement a pilot version of the year-round seating concept design.
- **Open Streets:** Stantec and CLOTH applied for five playstreets through the City's Open Streets program. In addition, they developed a proposal for Plaza de las Americas for a collective restaurant seating area and series of pop-up gardens to encourage purchase of take-out from nearby restaurants and to provide green spaces at this largely paved plaza.
- **Informational Materials:** Design Advocates created a print pamphlet for businesses as well as commercial property owners, to show the potential for pop-up activations in vacant storefronts.
- **Small Business Support:** In collaboration with Word Up Community Bookshop, the team designed Community Blocks, a flexible outdoor kit-of-parts that can be arranged to create a variety of structures that support educational programming, serve as a civic gathering space or help local businesses move their operations into the public realm. The team also worked with Sisters Uptown to design custom outdoor retail and seating for their facade.



### Top

Mock ups of Community Blocks, a kit-of-parts for educational programming.  
Photo: Design Advocates

### Bottom

The Woods Bagot team works to build an outdoor seating area for Salento.  
Photo: Woods Bagot



# COOPER SQUARE COMMITTEE

## LOWER EAST SIDE, MANHATTAN

CSC worked with Curtis + Ginsberg Architects (C+GA) to carry out several retrofits to their office on East 4th Street in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 for their staff and clients, including improved ventilation and safer physical barriers between staff and the public.

### ABOUT CSC

The Cooper Square Committee (CSC) works with area residents to contribute to the preservation and development of affordable, environmentally healthy housing and community/cultural spaces so that the Cooper Square area remains racially, economically, and culturally diverse. They have spearheaded significant neighborhood victories in their history, comprising over 50 years of tenant organizing, community-based planning, advocacy and development.

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Redesign Reception Area:** C+GA designed a new reception area using simple materials including wood, sheetrock, plexiglass. A glass paned door also maintains maximum visibility between the lobby area and the office, adding to a bright open ambiance.
- **Enhanced Safety Recommendations:** C+GA also recommended installing operable side storefront windows and purchasing air purifiers. They designed the new windows and assisted CSC with filing the permit to obtain approval from the Landmarks Preservation Commission, which was successful.
- **Signage and Protocols:** C+GA worked with CSC to develop staff safety protocols and signage to post in the office, encouraging the public to wear a mask, stand six feet apart, and use hand sanitizers when visiting the office.

A retrofit to the reception area of CSC for COVID safety designed by Curtis + Ginsberg Architects.

Photos: Curtis + Ginsberg Architects.





**FOURTH ARTS BLOCK**  
LOWER EAST SIDE,  
MANHATTAN

DLR Group, Buro Happold, Francis Cauffman Architects, Henning Larsen, Marvel, and SHoP worked with 13 of FABnyc’s member organizations to develop reopening strategies tailored to needs of smaller performing arts and culture organizations, including ways to participate in New York City’s Open Culture program.

**ABOUT FABNYC**

FABnyc is a team of artists and organizers working to preserve, sustain, and grow the cultural vibrancy of the Lower East Side neighborhood. FABnyc was founded in 2001 by a coalition of cultural and community nonprofits on East 4th Street to save their homes. Today their commitment to sustaining the cultural character and diversity of the community extends across the LES: from 14th Street to Canal, from Bowery to the East River.

FABnyc has been struggling to find real, concrete ways to support our cultural community – our theaters and dance spaces have been shut down since March 2020. Neighborhoods Now has been a powerful, steady partner through this time, working with our groups to imagine safe, creative ways to bring live performance back to NYC.

**Ryan Gilliam**  
Executive Director,  
FABnyc



A rendering of a shaded outdoor area for The Clemente in the Lower East Side.  
Image: FCA





## FOURTH ARTS BLOCK GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Safety Protocols:** In 2020, the FAB team worked with several theaters and cultural spaces to create safety protocols, entry and exit flows, and seating charts that allow for socially distanced events. DLR Group worked with La MaMa, Frigid New York, IATI Theater and Teatro Circulo to create outdoor waiting area plans that could extend the lobby and allow for multiple safe entrances. FCA worked with The Clemente to plan for signage installation that would aid in wayfinding and making sure social distancing protocol is followed. They also helped with planning seat arrangements for outdoor festivals. Henning Larsen worked with First Street Garden, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Swiss Institute, and Wild Project to plan for outdoor theaters, creating cost-effective mural walls and seating arrangements for indoor events.
- **Reopening Plans:** In 2021, with reopening on the immediate horizon, four more FABnyc members joined the effort with a range of needs. Marvel worked with the Gene Frankel Theater for their official reopening in April 2021, providing a socially-distant seating chart and plans to guide them going forward. They also collaborated with the Loisaída, Inc. to activate their underutilized outdoor spaces by designing areas for active and passive recreation, and enlivening them through murals.
- **Vision Plan:** The FAB Vision Plan team, consisting of SHoP Architects, DLR Group, Marvel, and Buro Happold, is working closely with Ryan Gilliam, FABnyc Executive Director, to develop a vision plan to be launched at the organization's anniversary event in September 2021. The Vision Plan will integrate a range of content, including a series of organizational goals, documentation of the broad range of efforts underway by FAB, and prospective activation strategies for a set of priority open spaces throughout the Lower East Side and East Village. The team has conducted a series of visioning sessions, site visits throughout the neighborhood, and charrette sessions to establish existing conditions and design goals.

Rendering of murals activating  
Loisaída, Inc's outdoor spaces.

Images: Marvel



# NORTHWEST BRONX COMMUNITY AND CLERGY COALITION

## KINGSBRIDGE, BRONX

COOKFOX, Design Advocates, MNLA, Perkins & Will, Scalar Architecture, and Studio Libeskind collaborated with the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC). Together, they designed a Civic Space Toolkit for community-based organizations to operate outdoors along with several short-term responses to the pandemic.

### ABOUT NWBCCC

Founded in 1974, the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) unites diverse peoples and institutions to fight for racial and economic justice through community organizing to transform the Bronx and beyond.

We've been so lucky to work with the *Neighborhoods Now* initiative, which has brought really talented technical capacity to help implement the solutions identified and developed by our community. **Neighborhoods Now is a great example of how partnerships across diverse stakeholders with community at the center can be transformative** when addressing economic and community development issues, especially at this challenging time when many residents and businesses feel invisible and forgotten.

**Sandra Lobo**

Executive Director, Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition



People hang outside of the Tropical Rotisserie Chicken outdoor opening in Kingsbridge, Bronx.

Photo: Cameron Blaylock



# NORTHWEST BRONX COMMUNITY AND CLERGY COALITION

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Civic Space Toolkit:** This universal system is designed for community-based organizations who want to resume their operations in the outdoor space. The system made of inexpensive and reutilized materials (wood crates, palettes, and strings) provides organizations with a flexible furniture and shading solution that can be used for various programs – from book fairs to movie nights and community events. The team is implementing this toolkit in NWBCCC’s backyard to create an outdoor library and hangout space.
- **Small Business Support:** The team organized a seminar for small businesses on how to apply for relief loans, and built out a colorful and eye-catching outdoor dining setup for local restaurant Tropical Rotisserie.
- **Community Cleanup:** In October 2020, the team organized Kingsbridge Day!, a day of service to spruce up the streets of Kingsbridge and highlight ongoing sanitation issues exacerbated by municipal funding cuts during the pandemic. Local residents and volunteers from across the city cleaned up litter and the nearby Aqueduct Walk Park, while a tree planting demonstration encouraged residents to imagine a neighborhood with more street trees to help combat heat vulnerability.
- **Artist Collaborations:** The team engaged local artists Felix and Dexter Ciprian to help create Tropical Rotisserie’s outdoor dining structure and Bronx-based graffiti artists Tats Cru to create a mural installation celebrating the neighborhood’s identity.



### Top

Felix and Dexter Ciprian work on plans for the outdoor dining set-up for Tropical Rotisserie Chicken.

Photo: Cameron Blaylock

### Bottom

The team, with the help of community members, hosts a clean-up day and Bronx-based graffiti artist Tats Cru paints a mural to celebrate the neighborhood’s identity.

Photo: Carla Swickerath





# UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING PROGRAM

## KINGSBRIDGE, BRONX

Dattner Architects and MBB collaborated with University Neighborhood Housing Program to create plans to update and reopen their main office in accordance with COVID-19 safety protocols.

### ABOUT UNHP

The mission of University Neighborhood Housing Program (UNHP) is to create, preserve, and improve affordable housing and bring needed resources to the Northwest Bronx. UNHP achieves its mission in three primary ways; as a community-based affordable housing developer, a Bronx-focused researcher, and through the Northwest Bronx Resource Center as a direct-service provider. The majority of our work benefits the Bronx and the northwest Bronx, a series of neighborhoods that are home to primarily Black, Hispanic, and immigrant low-income families and individuals.

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- **Safer Work Environment:** Dattner Architects and MBB worked closely with UNHP to reconfigure their main office and accommodate a six-foot distance between employees. The team also provided guidance on how to reduce the amount of workstations in each room, implement a COVID-19 check-in station to control the flow of people in the space, and install plexiglass partitions and air purifiers.
- **Outdoor Gathering Space:** For the Rose Hill Community Center, the team proposed a design for a cost-friendly outdoor module planter system suitable for social distancing that also serves as shaded cover.



**Top**  
Rending of the outdoor planter system  
for the Rose Hill Community Center.  
Image: Dattner Architects and MBB

**Bottom**  
The reconfiguration of the UNHP office  
space to ensure COVID safety.  
Photo: Dattner Architects and MBB





Jackson Heights team members  
making plans for the Plant and Paint  
event outside of the Field Office.  
Photo: Sam Lahoz



# CALLS TO ACTION

Change must be led by those most impacted by systemic challenges. **Community-led collaborations across sectors can shift the paradigm of community development.** The Urban Design Forum and Van Alen Institute call on our partners in design, city government, philanthropy, and community development to deepen our shared efforts to build a more equitable city.



# To our collaborators in New York City government:

## **Partner with community organizations to design for diverse neighborhood needs.**

New York City's under-resourced neighborhoods face distinct challenges from better resourced neighborhoods – and they hold unique visions for the future of their communities. The City should prioritize flexible, collaborative approaches to program design that can direct resources as needed and defined by specific communities.

- Recognizing the need for quick action in the context of the pandemic, five New York City departments – Health, Parks, Planning, Transportation, and Small Business Services – and the New York City Economic Development Corporation met directly with community leaders and their teams to give real time feedback on reopening plans. Transportation and Parks assigned staff to review and give feedback on neighborhood-based and even specific business plans.
- In the Bed-Stuy Gateway BID corridor, formal participation in the Open Storefronts program was low among local businesses. The BID worked with its design team to create Winter Wonderland, an open-air holiday market at nearby Marcy Plaza where businesses could benefit from seasonal open-air shops and a concentration of commercial activity to attract customers.

## **Build proactive approaches to program implementation.**

For small businesses, BIDs and merchant associations, and local stewardship organizations, structural barriers and longstanding neighborhood challenges mean that simply “knowing the rules” is not always enough to take advantage of a program or policy. The City should offer tailored technical assistance, equitably distributed funding, and multilingual resources to expand the reach of relief programs or temporary activations like Open Streets and Open Restaurants.

- With rapidly shifting regulations around the City's efforts to support small businesses, many restaurant owners in Jackson Heights, Queens did not know how to navigate permitting for programs like Open Restaurants. The *Neighborhoods Now* team worked as a “translator” of government programs and regulations, helping local businesses understand how best to take advantage of pandemic-related government programs and resources while also complying with changing guidelines and restrictions. More than 20 Jackson Heights small businesses took advantage of this support to reopen safely.



# To our co-conspirators in the design profession:

## **Develop trusting partnerships to build power with local communities.**

To build trust, designers should design “with” and not “for” communities of color that have experienced disinvestment and disenfranchisement. Designers should invest time and energy in forming intentional relationships with community members to understand local visions and help bring them to fruition. Design outcomes should be conceived to be implementable and financially feasible in the short term, and sustainable throughout their full life-cycle. Open, ongoing communication is key.

- All 11 design teams and community partners committed to regular check-ins throughout the course of their work. Designers and partners would review the status of ongoing projects, while also using their time to identify and troubleshoot any other specific challenges that emerged.
- The Chinatown team set out to create infrastructure for an open-air night market in an underused site at Forsyth Plaza. To introduce the new use, ensure the space is held for the Chinatown community, and activate the site immediately, the team curated a Chinatown-focused film series alongside local street vendors that has become a space of reunion and celebration.

**Think of design as integration.** Community-led design requires more than traditional design skills. Designers should embrace their role as holistic integrators, and serve as facilitators, engaged thought partners, project managers, liaisons, resource connectors, and more as needed.

- In Bed-Stuy, the design team not only provided site plans for the holiday market activation of Marcy Plaza, but also supported hands-on event production – sourcing supplies, developing a budget, and providing general project management support for market operations.
- Designers across working groups partnered with lawyers at Fried Frank to identify legal needs that supported their design services. Fried Frank developed template lease agreements to help organizations and local businesses gain access to underutilized or vacant private lots, and, with Alloy Development, hosted a Tenant Landlord Mediation Clinic to provide resources and information to tenants and landlords at risk of lease disputes that would displace businesses.

**Support diverse design leadership.** Design teams benefit from welcoming people with diverse identities, lived experiences, and perspectives into leadership. The design profession should support BIPOC practitioners to lead meaningful civic projects and create pathways to uplift MWBE firms.

- The Greenest Fern, a South Bronx-based sustainable design consulting firm, brought its understanding of the local community to the task of converting five underused community gardens into sites for local programming and cultural revitalization.



# To our partners at funding institutions:

**Support small but active organizations to build long-term capacity.** Neighborhood organizations in communities of color are doing herculean work with minimal resources, responding quickly and resourcefully to shifting conditions. Since these organizations understand their communities' needs best, funding should be trust-based and enable community based organizations to use resources for staffing, program development, digital or other infrastructure, and capital work, in whatever proportions they consider necessary. Lasting transformative change requires that organizations with deep, long-standing local relationships have the resources and autonomy to define and implement their own vision for the future.

- New York Community Trust provided unusual, catalytic early support for *Neighborhoods Now* that included funds that could be regranted to community partners for their immediate use as they saw fit.
- In the South Bronx, Banana Kelly used program regrants to purchase building materials and create a small crew of youth organizers to realize Banana Kelly's longer term vision of turning their community gardens into hubs for sustained community organizing and action.

**Invest in community-led planning at scale.** Every New York City community should have the same power to make change in their neighborhood as civic leaders in midtown Manhattan. Funders, nonprofits, and community leaders should partner to develop pilots and opportunities to embed community-led planning in every neighborhood and scale strategies that emerged from these efforts.

- The Bed-Stuy Restoration Corporation team developed a neighborhood land swap plan to enable small businesses to share sidewalks and other open spaces as a community asset. Called Be a Good Neighbor, this ingenious strategy could be scaled citywide.
- The Washington Heights team developed a proposal for Plaza de las Americas for a collective restaurant seating area to encourage take-out business from nearby restaurants – a model that could be applied across the city's many public plazas.



# To our resilient, inventive neighborhood partners:

## **Keep up the forward fight – and call us in.**

Change must be led by those most impacted by systemic challenges. As neighborhood organizations build community power to create a more equitable city, unconventional partners like architects, planners, and civic organizations working in the public realm can act as integrators, bringing critical resources and technical assistance to the table. We are ready to stand by your side, to continue learning together, and to provide holistic support in advancing your vision for the future.