



SMART



# MOBILE COOKING CLASSROOM

2013 CAPITAL PROJECT  
CHOSEN BY:

NYC COUNCIL SPEAKER  
MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO





RESIDENTS CAST THEIR VOTES ON HOW TO SPEND CAPITAL FUNDING SET ASIDE BY COUNCIL SPEAKER MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO, 2013



SMART UNIVERSITY FOUNDING DIRECTOR SUSAN RODRIGUEZ WITH THE MOBILE COOKING CLASSROOM PROPOSAL AT THE PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING EXPO, 2013

# INTRODUCING SMART

Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS/HIV Research & Treatment (**SMART**) was founded in 1998 to address the critical needs of women and youth living with or affected by HIV/AIDS within a safe, supportive community. SMART provides free, comprehensive HIV treatment education, including a highly successful nutrition, hands-on cooking, and wellness program that has improved health outcomes for participants and helps them live longer, healthier lives. Using a peer-driven model, we deliver the latest gender-specific treatment information; move participants from isolation to inclusion; and provide computer training and other essential skill sets.

SMART values self-determination. SMART women and youth are offered leadership opportunities that help them gain the confidence to advocate for quality healthcare for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Over the past couple of decades, new treatments have improved the quality of life for many individuals living with HIV/AIDS. At the same time, other chronic health issues and illnesses, including diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease, have spiked; and their rates are disproportionately high in low-income communities of color, which already have the highest rates of people living with HIV/AIDS. SMART's cutting-edge programming is the source for participants to learn about how to mitigate the devastating effects of these health challenges. We have witnessed firsthand the transformative process: SMART's participants possess the power and knowledge to be the foundation of a stronger and healthier community.

**SMART Body** became a formal nutrition education model in 2004. This hands-on cooking and nutrition program is taught in a commercial kitchen by a nutrition expert, and is supervised by a registered dietitian. Each class in the year-long, 24-week session connects nutritional topics with specific health issues: living with HIV/AIDS, and managing, for example, diabetes, cardio-vascular disease, and high blood pressure. SMART Body introduces many students to the tastes of a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, and every participant receives a grocery bag full of ingredients so they can replicate the recipes at home.

SMART envisioned the **Mobile Cooking Classroom** as a vehicle that can deliver the transformative, educational experience of SMART Body into the community-at-large. Building on our already extensive outreach network, the Mobile Cooking Classroom will travel to low-income communities of color—especially in East Harlem and the South Bronx—to engage with historically underserved populations: youth, seniors, immigrants, the homeless, and people with HIV/AIDS, among others. The Mobile Cooking Classroom will provide culturally appropriate nutrition and cooking classes, and resources designed to improve residents' access to healthy, affordable foods in their own communities.

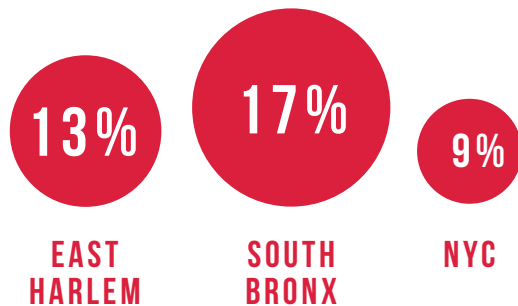
The Mobile Cooking Classroom will play a vital role in the movement to create a more sustainable, healthful food system for New Yorkers of all incomes. The Mobile Cooking Classroom's flexible and welcoming learning environment will introduce and demonstrate incremental lifestyle changes while building community through cooking and sharing meals. The custom-designed commercial "kitchen-on-wheels" is made possible by Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and the residents of District 8 who voted for the Mobile Cooking Classroom through the highly democratic Participatory Budgeting process, which the Speaker has championed.

# PRELIMINARY RESEARCH: HEALTH CONTEXT OF COUNCIL DISTRICT 8

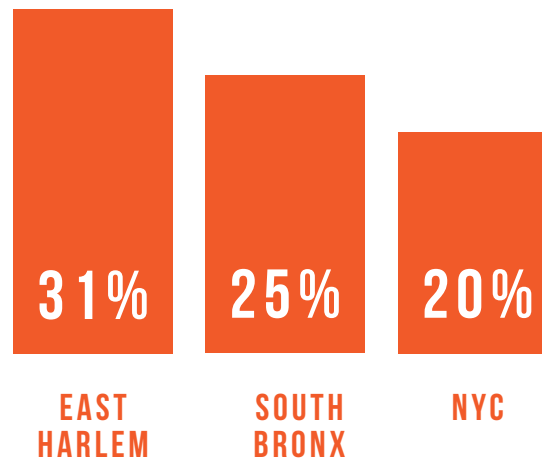
**EAST HARLEM<sup>1</sup> & SOUTH BRONX<sup>2</sup> RESIDENTS** ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY CHRONIC ILLNESSES THAT STEM FROM UNHEALTHY DIETS. IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS AND PROVIDING NUTRITIONAL EDUCATION CAN IMPROVE THESE NEIGHBORHOODS' OVERALL HEALTH.

## DIABETES AFFECTS

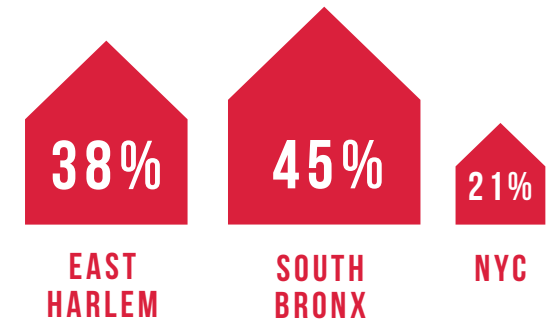
ALMOST TWICE AS MANY ADULTS IN EAST HARLEM & THE SOUTH BRONX AS IN NEW YORK CITY OVERALL



## OBESITY AFFECTS



TWICE AS MANY RESIDENTS LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL IN EAST HARLEM AND THE SOUTH BRONX, AS IN NYC OVERALL



THE LEADING CAUSE OF PREMATURE DEATH IN EAST HARLEM IS **HEART DISEASE (17%)**. THESE STATISTICS DEMONSTRATE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN POVERTY AND POOR HEALTH.

1. Data Source: Olson EC, Van Wye G, Kerker B, Thorpe L, Frieden TR. Take Care East Harlem. NYC Community Health Profiles, Second Edition; 2006; 21(42):1-16.

2. Data Source: Olson EC, Van Wye G, Kerker B, Thorpe L, Frieden TR. Take Care Hunts Point and Mott Haven. NYC Community Health Profiles, Second Edition; 2006; 7(42):1-16.



# BACKGROUND

There are many health issues present in low-income communities of color in New York City (NYC), neighborhoods including East Harlem, where SMART's office is located, and the nearby South Bronx. SMART has become part of the solution by addressing poor access to healthful foods and the lack of nutritional information within our community.

SMART's first-hand experience running nutrition and cooking programs for women and youth living with or affected by HIV/AIDS confirms that: exposure to healthy and delicious foods, instruction in preparing healthy recipes, access to affordable healthful foods, and straightforward nutritional information can change mindsets, create positive lifestyle changes and help maintain well individuals, families, and communities. The women created their own cookbook, Recipes from SMART's Kitchen Table, in 2013 to share their knowledge with others. This 2-year process was a result of support from Susan Rodriguez receiving the 2010 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Health Leader Award. The response to the FREE eCookbook (available on SMART's website: [www.smartuniversity.org](http://www.smartuniversity.org)) revealed the need for SMART's expertise to expand to the greater community.

After attending SMART Body:

- 92% of participants demonstrated an increase in nutrition knowledge from initial to post-intervention assessment.
- 100% of participants stated that they have replicated the recipes at home.
- 90% of participants stated that they have implemented steps to a healthier lifestyle.

However, healthy foods are generally more expensive than unhealthful foods, particularly in geographic areas like parts of East Harlem and the South Bronx, where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options--especially fresh

fruits and vegetables--is limited due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance and of lower quality when available.

Studies have found that urban residents who purchase groceries at small neighborhood stores pay between 3 to 37% more than people in the suburbs buying the same products at supermarkets.[1] Even when healthy food options are available, the higher cost is often prohibitive for many lower-income people, which is one reason why low-income communities have higher obesity rates and diet-related health conditions.

The price of fruits and vegetables in the US increased by nearly 75% between 1989 and 2005, while the price of fatty foods dropped by more than 26%.[2] Besides access and cost, other factors that influence what people buy and eat include: awareness--or lack thereof--of the importance of healthy eating and the connection between health and what we eat, familiarity with and knowledge of how to prepare certain ingredients, lack of preparation time, marketing, cultural practices and taste. The good news is that in gathering information from the community that will be used in shaping programming for the Mobile Cooking Classroom, we have found that the majority of those surveyed DO COOK for themselves and their families. There is a community eager for the education and training we can provide.

1. Bullard, Robert D. (editor). Growing Smarter: Achieving Livable Communities, Environmental Justice, and Regional Equity. The MIT Press. 2007. p. 173.

2. Walsh, Bryan. "It's Not Just Genetics." Time. June 12, 2008.<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1813984,00.html> (3/05/11)

# OUR COMMUNITY HAS SPOKEN...

The Mobile Cooking Classroom has incorporated the ideas and voices of community residents from the start. Inspired by self-assessments of SMART Body participants that reflected improved health and wellness, we wanted to share these life-changing experiences to help build a stronger, healthier community. SMART was given that opportunity through the Participatory Budgeting (PB) initiative.

PB is a democratic process that invests community members with the power to decide how to spend part of the city's budget. A growing number of NYC Council Members have engaged in the PB process since its inception in 2011. District residents are invited to directly decide how to spend at least \$1 million of the discretionary capital funds allocated to each Council Member. Participating Council Members encourage their district residents to come together, brainstorm and come up with proposals for local infrastructure projects that are inclusive and create equity, and then vote on the proposals they feel are most essential. Winning projects are allocated capital funding from the Council Member's discretionary budget.

SMART is located in District 8 (East Harlem and the South Bronx), represented by Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, one of the first "pioneering" Council

Members to bring PB to her district and give the power to the community members to vote on projects. SMART wanted to create a project that could be inclusive of all the neighborhoods in the district and bring people together while promoting health and nutrition.

Thinking of a cooking/nutrition project that could reach across neighborhood lines and serve a wide variety of residents gave birth to our vision of a kitchen-on-wheels: The Mobile Cooking Classroom was initially just an online "idea" submission in fall 2011.

However, this idea gained traction through the PB Public Health Committee which gave us the impetus to fully develop and propose the project the following year in fall 2012.

In spring 2013, the Mobile Cooking Classroom was 1 of 6 projects to receive the highest number of votes for the PB Process in District 8 and approved by Council Speaker Mark-Viverito for capital funding! We then reached out to Hester Street Collaborative (HSC), another community based organization that specializes in large community engagement projects, to assist us in making our vision a reality for this innovative, custom-designed Mobile Cooking Classroom.



IDENTIFY NEED FOR  
BETTER NUTRITION EDUCATION

RESIDENTS VOTE TO FUND THE  
SMART MOBILE COOKING  
CLASSROOM

SMART GATHERS COMMUNITY  
INPUT FOR PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

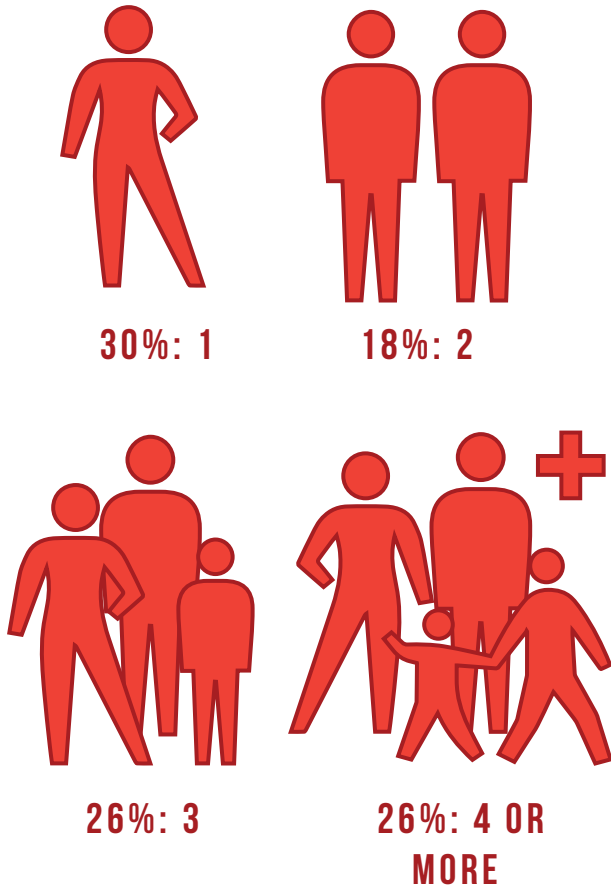
PROGRAMMING IS TAILORED  
TO THE NEEDS OF THE  
NEIGHBORHOOD

THE MOBILE COOKING  
CLASSROOM HELPS BUILD  
A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY!



# VISIONING RESULTS: WHO ARE THE MOBILE COOKING CLASSROOM'S STUDENTS?

**70%** OF THOSE SURVEYED  
ARE COOKING FOR MORE THAN  
JUST THEMSELVES

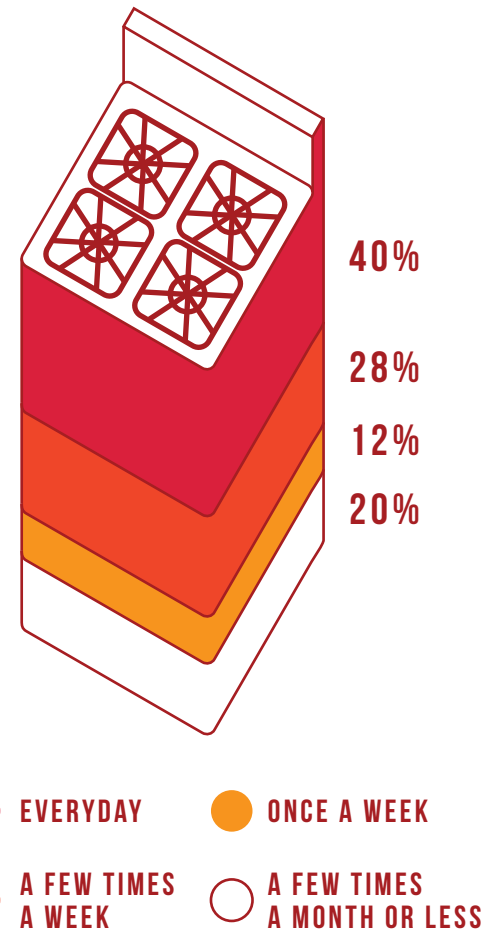


**40%** ARE NOT GETTING  
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES  
DAILY\*



\* THE USDA RECOMMENDS A  
MINIMUM OF 2-3 CUPS OF FRUIT  
AND VEGETABLES DAILY<sup>1</sup>

**68%** COOK A FEW TIMES A  
WEEK OR MORE



1. Data Source: [www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/vegetables-amount.html](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/vegetables-amount.html)



# VISIONING RESULTS: WHAT DO FUTURE USERS WANT?

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## RESOURCES



TREATING ILLNESS  
THROUGH DIET



HERBS TO TREAT  
SPECIFIC AILMENTS



HEALTHY  
ALTERNATIVES TO  
COMFORT FOODS



NUTRITIONAL  
EDUCATION  
HANDOUTS

## PROGRAMMING

### PARTICIPANTS WANTED:



77%: HEALTHY  
COOKING CLASSES



75%: MEALS ON  
A BUDGET



68%: FAMILY  
CLASSES



52%: CHILDREN'S  
CLASSES

## AMENITIES



PROVIDE HOT MEALS  
DURING AN  
EMERGENCY



COMMUNITY  
GATHERING SPACE

# TRAILER/TRUCK COST ANALYSIS

2014 FORD F250.....\$64,958.00

FEATHERLITE 4926 PERFECTFIT TRAILER - STANDARD  
FEATURES.....\$20,367.00

CUSTOM FEATURES.....\$68,387.00  
(INCLUDING COMMERCIAL RANGE: \$5,396.96,  
COMMERCIAL FRIDGE + FREEZER: \$6,410.34,  
ADA LIFT: \$9,087, COUNTERTOPS + ISLANDS: \$7,862)

CUSTOM INTERIOR.....\$36,428.00  
(INCLUDING EXHAUST HOOD + FAN: \$12,033,  
AWNING: \$3,542.00, RUBBER TILE FLOOR: \$5,304)

TOTAL COST \$190,141.00  
TOTAL CAPITAL AWARD \$185,000.00

# DESIGN, PROGRAMMING & OUTREACH

The results of the community visioning sessions served as the basis for the design, programming and outreach strategies. The results also reinforced the health data for East Harlem and South Bronx as well as stories we've gathered over the years from our community at SMART. People are cooking for themselves and their families—often with a few generations in the kitchen at the same time; and there is a strong need in the greater community for a diverse menu of cooking classes.

The **Design** of the Mobile Cooking Classroom is a custom-built, handicap-accessible vehicle equipped with a commercial-grade kitchen and classroom space large enough to accommodate 10 participants, a nutrition expert, a Coordinator and Navigators. There will be interior cameras, exterior large TV screens with speakers to show people “outside” what is going on “inside”; it also makes it a more handicap-accessible program to more people.

The **Programs** of the Mobile Cooking Classroom are FREE nutrition education and healthy cooking demonstrations staged in front of various locations throughout District 8: NYCHA developments, senior centers, hospitals, supportive housing sites, farmers' markets, community centers, parks and community-based organizations. Curriculums will be tailored to meet the specific venue and/or populations to be served. The Mobile Cooking Classroom will operate on a year-round basis, weather permitting.

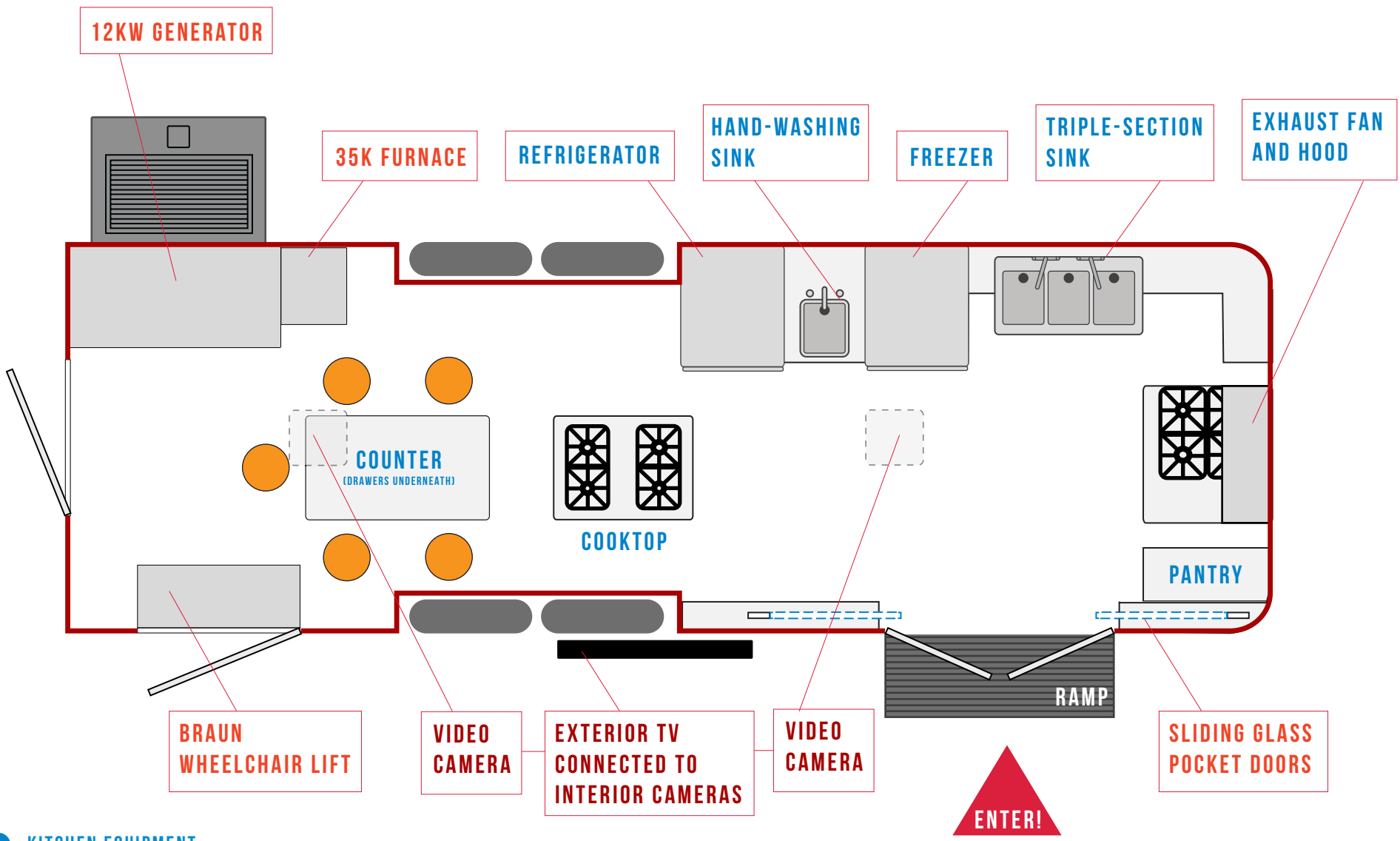
Here are some of the skills we hope each participant will learn from the Mobile Cooking Classroom:

- Read labels and understand the nutritional value of food; why their bodies need—and how they process—vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, protein, fiber and fats.
- Shop wisely and eat healthfully on a budget in their own neighborhoods.
- Become familiar with healthy ingredients; people will learn to cook and taste a variety of healthful foods in the workshops.

- Learn to prepare traditional ethnic dishes in a healthier way.
- Replicate recipes at home for themselves, their families, and friends; participants receive recipes, ingredients and a local food resource list after each session.

Having successfully served hundreds of women and youth living with HIV/AIDS through SMART University, SMART Body and SMART Body Youth, we are eager to apply our more than 15 years' worth of experience and expertise to Mobile Cooking Classroom operations. Our educational model addresses multiple obstacles—geographic, logistical, or cultural—that many New Yorkers face, which limit their access to much-needed and lifestyle-changing information about health, nutrition, and wellness, and to ways to build community power and capacity. The Mobile Cooking Classroom curriculum design, like that of all our nutrition programs, is being overseen by a registered dietitian.

**Outreach** to our community partners is essential: A supportive community is as vital to improving one's health as learning nutritional information and cooking skills. Therefore, our goals include establishing support systems with our community partners by visiting sites at least once a quarter. The Coordinator and Navigators are integral to our outreach strategies with community partners. They have extensive experience with SMART Body, our in-house cooking and nutrition program, and will play a critical role in community outreach, engagement and retention.



- KITCHEN EQUIPMENT
- AUDIO-VISUAL EQUIPMENT
- CUSTOMIZED FIXTURES

PLAN OF THE SMART MOBILE COOKING CLASSROOM



A VIEW INSIDE THE COMMERCIAL KITCHEN CLASSROOM, WITH A LIVE BROADCAST OF THE CLASS BEING SCREENED OUTSIDE THE VEHICLE.





THE MOBILE COOKING CLASSROOM BEING USED AS A COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS RESPONSE VEHICLE DURING AN EMERGENCY

# COMMUNITY RESILIENCE & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

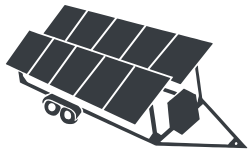
During times of an emergency or disaster, the Mobile Cooking Classroom will be able to provide support in the community when it “transforms” into a Community Preparedness Response (CPR) vehicle. Our goal is to equip the CPR vehicle with a charging station for cell phones, laptops and medical equipment as well as TV screens to play live news reports. In coordination with NYC’s Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and other governmental agencies, the CPR vehicle will work with first responders and volunteer agencies to:

- Provide hot and nutritious food and water as a small-scale distribution site.
- Be a viable and trusted source to disseminate important information to the community, especially if there is no electricity or phone service.
- Coordinate with local organizations and housing sites to provide meals for those with medical or dietary restrictions.

SMART is working alongside the Red Cross, East Harlem Emergency Preparedness Collaborative and city-wide coordinating networks to ensure that SMART is a part of all emergency response plans. With the CPR vehicle, we will be able to respond to the specific dietary needs of special populations. We are committed to ensuring the health and well-being of our community at all times, and we believe having the ability to transform the Mobile Cooking Classroom into the CPR vehicle is an essential part of our mission.

# POTENTIAL ADD-ONS

The funding we were awarded in the Participatory Budgeting Process is covering the cost of our truck and a trailer with the most basic features needed to operate the commercial kitchen and conduct classes. However, there are additional capital improvements that would augment the impact of the Mobile Cooking Classroom. We are seeking funds to ensure that the Mobile Cooking Classroom is able to provide the best possible services.



## Solar Energy Sources

Integrating solar energy sources will allow us to provide our services and programs and lessen our carbon footprint. In addition, it will also result in less noise pollution and fewer emissions compared to a traditional generator.



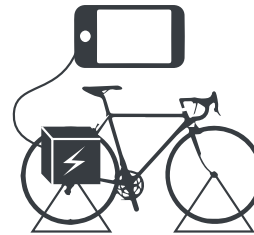
## WiFi Network

A WiFi network would allow us to stream educational videos for cooking classes as well as be an important resource for information and communication when the vehicle was being used as a Community Preparedness Response (CPR) vehicle.



## Public Announcement (PA) System

A PA system will be crucial when the Mobile Cooking Classroom is being used as a CPR vehicle, especially during power and phone outages. It will allow us to announce important messages and disseminate information quickly and efficiently.



## Human Powered Equipment

Since we are located in a high asthma corridor, we want to explore all options for alternative energy for the Mobile Cooking Classroom. We want to reduce our emissions in every possible way. Using a bicycle frame with a generator and inverter, we can create and store electricity from a good work-out.



## Additional Portable Commercial Kitchen Equipment

As part of our larger-scale outdoor nutrition education and healthy cooking demonstrations and to support our community during times of emergency, we will need additional commercial grade equipment such as: warming boxes, small refrigerator units, outdoor grill, etc.



Photo credits from left to right: Jeannie Choe, inhabitat, Buffalo Grid, inhabitat.



# GET INVOLVED



**VOLUNTEER WITH SMART!**

**SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER!**

**DONATE ONLINE OR BY CHECK!**

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

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