

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS:

new yorkers talk fair housing

JUNE 2019



where
we live
nyc FAIR HOUSING TOGETHER

table of contents

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
9	INTRODUCTION
11	HOW WE ENGAGED
12	Community-Centered Approach
14	Who We Reached
17	WHAT WE LEARNED
17	Confronting Segregation
27	Fighting Discrimination
35	Promoting Housing Choice
45	Increasing Access to Opportunity
54	Defining Success
57	WHAT'S NEXT
58	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



executive summary

Through Where We Live NYC, the City of New York is undertaking an inclusive, comprehensive, and collaborative planning process to build the next chapter of fair housing policy for our city. To better understand how challenges like segregation and discrimination impact the lives of New Yorkers, the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and Hester Street organized 62 Community Conversations across the five boroughs in 15 different languages, engaging more than 700 New Yorkers.

what is Where We Live NYC?

A collaborative planning process led by the City of New York to develop the next chapter of fair housing policies that confront segregation, fight discrimination, and build more just and inclusive neighborhoods.

what is a community conversation?

An interactive focus-group style meeting of New York City residents from a specific population, community, or neighborhood led in partnership with a trained community organization or HPD staff.



how we engaged

Through the Where We Live NYC Community Conversations, we sought to understand the lived experiences of populations protected by fair housing law, while also sharing tools, information, and resources to support residents in creating and advocating for change.

To reach a meaningful cross-section of New Yorkers from a variety of backgrounds and geographies, we partnered with community-based organizations who have cultivated trusting relationships with residents. The conversation format and materials were designed with a focus on accessibility. We worked with community partners to develop translated materials and modifications for people with disabilities.

WHO WE REACHED

We held conversations to understand the unique fair housing challenges of the following communities:



Various racial, ethnic, and religious communities



Immigrants, including undocumented individuals and those with limited English proficiency



People with disabilities, including mobility, sensory, and developmental disabilities



LGBTQ individuals, including transgender and gender nonconforming individuals



Residents using rental assistance, including Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and City-administered programs like CityFHEPS



NYCHA residents

Survivors of domestic violence

Youth and seniors

Justice-involved individuals

Homeless or formerly homeless individuals

62 Community Conversations

700+ participants

ABOUT 1/3

- » are Black
- » have or are living with someone with a disability
- » are seniors (age 62 or older)

MORE THAN 1/4

- » are Hispanic/Latinx
- » are residents living with children

ABOUT 40%

- » are extremely low income (making a household income of \$20,000 or less)

what we learned

The Community Conversations invited New Yorkers to reflect on how they make tough decisions about where to live, how their home and neighborhood impact their lives, and what goals they have for their family and community. Below is a summary of key insights from across different conversations:



CONFRONTING SEGREGATION

The City is working to better understand how New Yorkers experience segregation, diversity, and inclusion across different populations and neighborhoods. We will use this input to develop policy that takes a balanced and nuanced approach to these issues.

When it comes to integration, New Yorkers have different definitions.

For some, integration is when a diverse set of people call the same neighborhood home. Others define integration as an active process of building trust and relationships between neighbors from diverse backgrounds, rather than a measurement of who lives where. When discussing integration, New Yorkers often focused on race and ethnicity, though definitions can expand to include socioeconomic diversity, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

For many, equity matters more than integration.

In discussing their vision for fair housing, many residents focused less on integration and more on equitable access to opportunities and amenities, especially in diverse and non-White neighborhoods.

Enclaves can offer both opportunities and limitations

Participating New Yorkers shared a variety of perspectives when it comes to living in enclaves with residents of a similar background. Some depend on enclaves to practice cultural traditions, attend places of worship, shop for specialized goods, or connect with neighbors, employers, and doctors who speak their language. Others prefer living in diverse neighborhoods, often believing that integrated neighborhoods open up more opportunity and economic advancement.

“Being from the Bronx, nearly all the neighborhoods that I have lived in were exclusively Black and Latino. I don’t think this was a problem. [But] the fact that class or economic diversity didn’t exist in these neighborhoods did limit our community’s offerings and livability.”

—COMMENT, WHERE WE LIVE NYC WEBSITE

Gentrification does not feel like meaningful integration

For many New Yorkers, gentrification is their only experience living in what they consider to be a racially integrated neighborhood, and many are worried about the impact on their communities. Residents reported that rapid demographic shifts can strain local relationships, as longtime residents and businesses are no longer able to afford to stay and norms regarding culture, policing, gathering, and street life change.

Integration has the potential to build stronger communities, but it takes work.

Many residents view integration as an opportunity to build tolerance, unity, and solidarity across diverse communities. However, most participating residents shared that this vision of integration is aspirational and rarely something they experience in their neighborhoods. Many recognized that time, energy, and resources are required to build trust and relationships at the local level.

Recognizing that unequal treatment in the housing market takes many forms, it is essential for the City to understand exactly how these challenges play out, what forms discrimination takes, and where there are gaps in fair housing enforcement.

FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION

More than 50 years after the Fair Housing Act was passed, many New Yorkers still face discrimination when it comes to finding and maintaining their homes. Recognizing that unequal treatment in the housing market takes many forms, it is essential for the City to understand exactly how these challenges play out, what forms discrimination takes, and where there are gaps in fair housing enforcement.

Housing discrimination remains a major challenge for New Yorkers.

Participating New Yorkers shared detailed accounts of discrimination by landlords, brokers, and other real estate professionals when trying to find housing, illustrating that discrimination in the housing search process is still a widespread practice that limits housing options.

Fighting discrimination also means fighting the unequal treatment of tenants.

New Yorkers made clear that discrimination and unfair treatment occur frequently beyond the housing search process in interactions with landlords and management as a tenant. From poor repairs to racist threats of violence, residents reported experiencing mistreatment because of their identity, often with a clear connection to fair housing protections.

Stigma and bias are especially challenging for residents using government housing programs.

Many participants discussed how they face stigma living as a resident of the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) or using rental assistance, including Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and City-administered programs like CityFHEPS. The experiences of participants illustrate how negative bias about poverty, often reinforced by racism, can limit residents' access to housing and other opportunities. Many described feeling that landlords, brokers, neighbors, and sometimes even case managers and support staff working for the City treat them like criminals.

Enforcement processes often leave residents feeling powerless.

Many participating residents expressed that the power dynamic between tenants and landlords leaves them feeling trapped and helpless in the face of discrimination and harassment. Many choose not to report bad behavior because they fear retaliation or have concerns about finding a new home with the limited affordable housing options in New York City's competitive market. Some residents who reported taking action, found enforcement processes to be slow, time consuming, and confusing.

PROMOTING HOUSING CHOICE

The City is seeking to increase opportunity for all New Yorkers by promoting housing choice—the choice to move into a different neighborhood or the choice to stay in a neighborhood, even as it changes. Detailed information about why New Yorkers live in their neighborhood and where they want to move will help the City develop policies to better support New Yorkers in making the housing choice that is best for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Few New Yorkers feel like they have meaningful options when choosing a home or neighborhood because of the high cost of housing.

Most participating residents were low-income and reported that the high cost of housing in New York City dramatically limits their ability to have a real choice in their home and neighborhood. Instead, residents reported compromising with poor conditions and overcrowding, or limiting their housing search to neighborhoods that feel unsafe or have underperforming schools. Residents also shared that they rely heavily on government housing programs, including the shelter system, in order to survive in a market that feels too expensive for them.

A lack of housing choice impacts the most fundamental details of New Yorkers' lives.

Residents discussed the high stress and sacrifice that results from having little or no access to safe, quality, and affordable housing. In addition to housing challenges, many residents reported regularly travelling far distances because their neighborhood lacks quality employment, schooling, doctors, or groceries.

Family, community, and sense of belonging play a major role in where people live.

Participating New Yorkers stressed the importance of living near family and community. These local relationships can serve as key support systems, especially for recent immigrants. Residents of color also reported that they feel they have fewer options because of historic and present-day norms about who is welcome where and how neighborhoods are monitored and policed.

Government housing programs can have a limiting impact on neighborhood choice

Government housing programs—including NYCHA, rental assistance programs, supportive housing, and HPD-funded housing—provide positive, even transformative opportunities for many participating residents seeking housing stability. However, residents also reported that participating in these programs can mean losing the opportunity to choose their neighborhood—prioritizing an affordable apartment, regardless of location. This can mean moving away from friends and family, moving into neighborhoods with fewer resources, or feeling stuck in government housing programs because the private market is too expensive.

“My coworker says, ‘Why would anyone want to live in the projects?’ And I say, ‘Where else am I going to live?’ My mom is disabled so she can’t work and also she has a lot of us. It’s hard. We would be homeless otherwise. People live where they can afford to live.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

INCREASING ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Through Community Conversations, New Yorkers discussed how the interplay of forces like gentrification, integration, and housing choice affect their access to resources and opportunity. They also shared what makes a neighborhood great. This feedback will inform the City's policy approach as it addresses disparities in government and private investment across neighborhoods and works to provide the resources residents need to thrive.

New York City offers unparalleled opportunities.

Many participating residents discussed how New York City offers opportunities that they could not find living anywhere else. Residents celebrate the strong public benefits, access to good education, and welcoming neighborhoods filled with diverse cultures and identities.

Deep inequalities exist in access to opportunity

Residents discussed their perceptions of how investments from government and the private sector may vary dramatically across different neighborhoods. Many New Yorkers believe that historic and present-day racism impact who has access to opportunity and perceived that neighborhoods with more White residents often have more wealth, investment, and higher-quality amenities. Residents also discussed the complex dynamic between gentrification, opportunity, and exclusion—reflecting on who gets access to amenities as neighborhoods change.

New Yorkers discussed how the interplay of forces like gentrification, integration, and housing choice affect their access to resources and opportunity.

DEFINING SUCCESS

During the Community Conversations, participating New Yorkers developed a collective vision of what success looks like for their own housing journey, their family and community, and the Where We Live NYC process. In dreaming up this future, residents stressed the importance of belonging, community connection, dignity, and self-determination.



what's next

The input gathered through the Community Conversations will directly inform the City's development of fair housing goals and strategies that confront segregation, fight discrimination, and increase opportunity for all.

In addition to the Community Conversations, the City is also conducting data analysis, collaborating with more than 30 government agencies, and collecting input from a Fair Housing Stakeholder Group of more than 150 advocates, service providers, researchers, and community leaders to help inform the process.

The City will release a draft Where We Live NYC report in the summer of 2019 that will include a full overview of what we have learned throughout this effort along with draft goals and strategies. A final report will be published in the fall of 2019 that will formally launch the implementation phase of this process, following a detailed policy action plan outlined in the report.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION!

Share your fair housing ideas and experience to help us build a more just future for our city.

Visit nyc.gov/WhereWeLive:



Host your own Community Conversation with friends, family, or neighbors



Answer questions online about your home and neighborhood



Learn more about the history of fair housing and your rights



Explore data on diversity and opportunity in New York City



Sign up for our newsletter to hear about upcoming events and announcements



You can also share a thought-provoking quote from a Community Conversation or your own fair housing insights using **#WhereWeLiveNYC**.



introduction

Where we live matters. It impacts our access to affordable housing, good jobs, quality schools, reliable transportation, and a neighborhood that is safe, healthy, and welcoming. That is why the City of New York is working with residents and community leaders through the Where We Live NYC process to better understand how challenges like segregation and discrimination impact New Yorkers' lives and to develop policy solutions that advance opportunity for all.

This document provides an overview of key insights shared by more than 700 New Yorkers who participated in 62 Community Conversations. There is also a detailed overview of how the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and Hester Street designed the Community Conversations in partnership with dedicated community-based organizations, as well as information on how to get involved with the Where We Live NYC process moving forward.

The Community Conversations are one of several key inputs feeding into the Where We Live NYC process. The City is also conducting extensive data analysis; collaborating with more than 30 government agencies, including the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA); and consulting a Fair Housing Stakeholder Group of more than 150 advocates, service providers, researchers, and community leaders. Taken together, this feedback and data analysis, will inform policy solutions that fight discrimination, break down barriers to opportunity, and build more just and inclusive neighborhoods.



“People really were into the idea of their input feeding into the City’s report. We used it as a tool to build up connections and partnerships with other organizations, and that felt successful. We looked into how various issues are connected, and people got really excited.”

—BANANA KELLY COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

how we engaged

New Yorkers are experts in their own experience, which is why the City held 62 Community Conversations in neighborhoods across the five boroughs to learn directly from a diverse cross-section of residents about how fair housing issues impact their lives. The Where We Live NYC Community Conversations were designed to:

ENGAGE & ACKNOWLEDGE

Clearly communicate the goals and outcomes of Where We Live NYC and acknowledge the historical and ongoing injustices related to housing discrimination and segregation.

LISTEN & LEARN

Hear directly from New Yorkers how segregation, discrimination, and housing choice affect their lives, families, and access to opportunity—and discuss what we can do moving forward.

CONNECT & BUILD CAPACITY

Build community ownership of the process by investing in community-based partners to help us listen to residents and collect data, while also sharing information about fair housing history and current fair housing resources.



community-centered approach

HPD and Hester Street designed a decentralized engagement model that built the capacity of trusted community partners to lead focus group-style Community Conversations in their neighborhoods.

This allowed us to engage more than 700 New Yorkers in meaningful, intimate conversations in 15 different languages about challenging issues and, at times, painful experiences. The conversation format and materials were also designed with a focus on accessibility, and we worked with community partners to develop translated materials and modifications for people with disabilities.

“Our base is made up of people in public housing. We’ve been thinking about how we move our members from anger to strategy, so I appreciate that the [Where We Live NYC] tools laid out where we fit in. Our members were able to see how people were impacted by redlining. That is how we got here in the first place, and this is how we move forward.”

—FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERS:

Ali Forney Center
Arab American Association NY
Asian Americans for Equality
Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association
Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled
Center for Court Innovation
Center for Independence of the Disabled NY
Chhaya Community Development Corporation
Fifth Avenue Committee
Make the Road New York
Neighbors Together
SAGE Advocacy & Services for LGBT Elders
Sapna NYC

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM:

Arverne View Tenant Association/L+M Development Partners
The Axis Project
Bronx Power
Flatbush Development Corporation
Guns Down Life Up
HPD’s Division of Tenant Resources
Independence Care System
Mekong NYC
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty
MinKwon Center for Community Action
Neighbors Helping Neighbors
NYC Anti-Violence Project
NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA)
NYC Mayor’s Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV)
NYC Family Justice Center in Staten Island
The Point Community Development Corporation
Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus
United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg
Voces Latinas

format

RACIAL JUSTICE AND FACILITATION TRAININGS

To cultivate inclusive and affirming spaces for residents, staff from all participating community partner organizations and HPD attended a day-long training focused on facilitation skill-building, racial justice framing, and education on fair housing issues. During this training, the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC) provided tools and guidance for fostering a meaningful and productive dialogue at the intersection of race, discrimination, and fair housing.

DOWNLOADABLE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

We also developed a downloadable toolkit, hosted on the Where We Live NYC website, to invite any resident or organization to lead their own Community Conversation and share back insights to inform the process. The toolkit includes a short video about the history of segregation in New York City and links to resources for participants to continue learning about fair housing or get support for specific housing needs.

CONVERSATIONS LED BY COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Our community partner organizations enabled us to reach residents who would not otherwise interact with government, especially around issues as sensitive as segregation and discrimination. The Community Conversations invited residents into the Where We Live NYC process, capturing their personal experiences and deep knowledge of neighborhoods, while also sharing tools, information, and resources to support residents in creating and advocating for change.

CONVERSATIONS LED BY HPD

HPD organized and led additional conversations with community-based and government partners to ensure that our engagement surfaced ideas from a diverse and broad range of residents impacted by fair housing challenges.

ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

Following the Community Conversations, we invited staff from participating community-based organizations to discuss what they learned and how they might work together on long-term fair housing and related advocacy goals. Building off these conversations, HPD will hold a series of public events throughout 2019 where New Yorkers can learn about emerging insights, goals, and strategies and share additional feedback. Input from the Community Conversations will also inform ongoing meetings of the Fair Housing Stakeholder Group.

“Usually the members in the community we serve are cautious about sharing their past experiences around discrimination and housing, especially when those asking are not members of their community. But our members were very happy to participate. They loved sharing experiences even if those experiences weren’t so pleasant.”

—ARAB AMERICAN ASSOCIATION NY

who we reached

The Community Conversations focused on engaging populations historically impacted by fair housing issues and communities that often have less voice in government decision-making. Specifically, we held conversations to understand the unique fair housing challenges of the following communities:



Various racial, ethnic, and religious communities



Immigrants, including undocumented individuals and those with limited English proficiency



People with disabilities, including physical; sensory (blind, deaf, hard of hearing); and intellectual disabilities



LGBTQ individuals, including transgender and gender nonconforming individuals



Residents using rental assistance, including Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and City-administered programs like CityFHEPS



NYCHA residents
Survivors of domestic violence

Youth and seniors

Justice-involved individuals

Homeless or formerly homeless individuals

62

Community Conversations

700+

participants

70%

of conversations included a language other than English

15

languages

Arabic, American Sign Language, Bangla, Cantonese, English, Haitian Kreyol, Hindi, Khmer, Korean, Mandarin, Nepali, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese

demographics*

**MORE THAN
1/4**

- » are Hispanic/Latinx
- » are residents living with children

**ABOUT
1/3**

- » are Black
- » have or are living with someone with a disability
- » are seniors (age 62 or older)

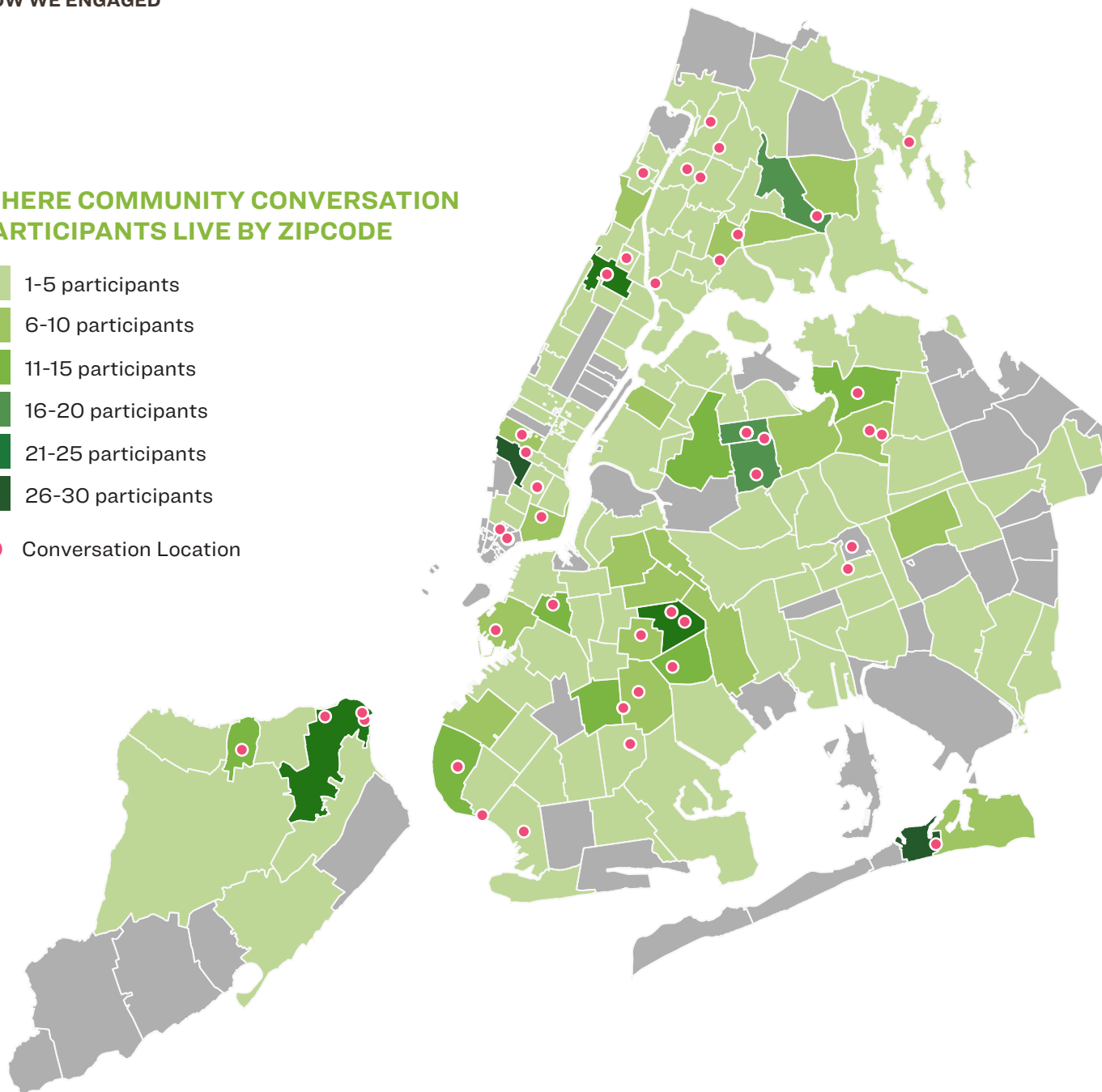
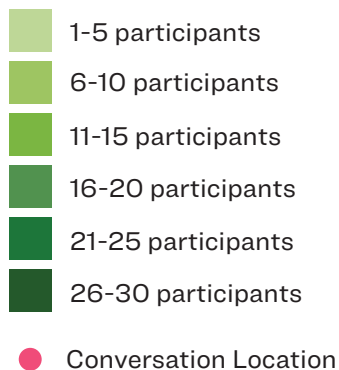
**ABOUT
40%**

- » were born outside the U.S

**ABOUT
20%**

- » have limited English proficiency

WHERE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS LIVE BY ZIPCODE



income & housing*

ABOUT
40%

» are extremely low income
(making a household
income of \$20,000 or less)

ABOUT
25%

» are low-income
(making a household
income of \$20,000-
\$49,999)

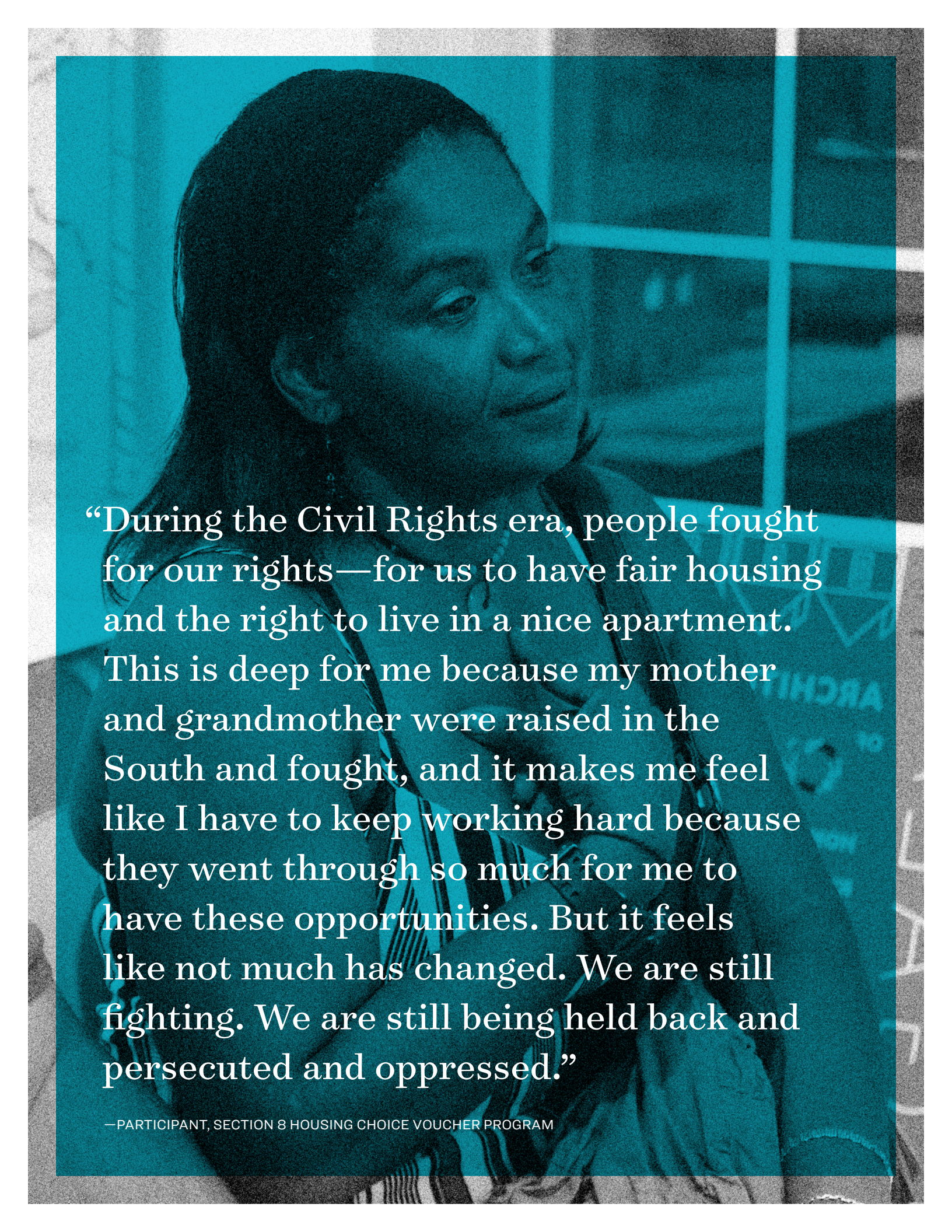
ABOUT
15%

» are residents using
rental assistance

1 IN 5

» have experienced
homelessness
» are NYCHA residents

*From Community Conversation participants who submitted worksheets. Note that response rates for questions on submitted worksheets ranged from 75-88%.



“During the Civil Rights era, people fought for our rights—for us to have fair housing and the right to live in a nice apartment. This is deep for me because my mother and grandmother were raised in the South and fought, and it makes me feel like I have to keep working hard because they went through so much for me to have these opportunities. But it feels like not much has changed. We are still fighting. We are still being held back and persecuted and oppressed.”

—PARTICIPANT, SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

WHAT WE LEARNED:

confronting segregation

To understand fair housing challenges, we must understand our shared history and recognize the ongoing legacy of segregation and the impact it has on New York City today.

Each Community Conversation began with a short presentation on the history of fair housing to acknowledge the past, spark a discussion of participants' current experiences with segregation and integration, and open up dialogue about what it means to build a more just future. Through the conversations, residents discussed whether their current neighborhood feels diverse, integrated, and welcoming, and if living in an integrated neighborhood is something they value.

With this feedback, the City is working to better understand the experiences of different populations and neighborhoods, using this input to develop policy that takes a balanced and nuanced approach to these issues.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ACTIVITY

our shared history

Each Community Conversation started with a presentation that briefly walked participants through relevant moments in American history, from the end of slavery through redlining and urban renewal to present-day disparities in access to opportunity and fair housing rights. For some residents, especially recent immigrants, this history presentation provided new context. For others, it validated painful and formative personal experiences.

“I lived my whole life in Cypress Hills [in Brooklyn]. When my family moved here, it was largely White, but [the White residents] were moving out to Howard Beach. My grandparents would tell me stories of the White neighbors hating the people of color moving in, they would throw garbage on their street. It’s racially integrated now—a mix of West Indian, Caribbean, South Asian, Latino, and Bengali populations. My parents wanted to move to Forest Hills, but the real estate agent steered them to Cypress Hills. I see both segregation and also integration [in Cypress Hills]. There are people of color coming together, but it’s because of class. Most people move here because it’s a working class neighborhood and they can’t afford to move into other neighborhoods.”

—PARTICIPANT, CHHAYA CDC

When it comes to integration, New Yorkers have different definitions.

For some, integration is when a diverse set of people call the same neighborhood home. Others define integration as an active process of building trust and relationships between diverse neighbors, rather than a measurement of who lives where. For these residents, integration looks like diverse interactions in local businesses and schools, opportunities to experience different foods and cultures, or residents from a mix of backgrounds coming together to tackle local issues.

When New Yorkers discussed integration, they often focused on race and ethnicity, but even these discussions were nuanced. For example, residents in Central Queens discussed the diversity of immigrant communities in their neighborhoods, but also recognized that they have very few Black neighbors. In other Community Conversations, definitions of integration expanded to include socioeconomic diversity, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

“An integrated neighborhood simply is one with various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic groups.”

—COMMENT, WHERE WE LIVE NYC WEBSITE

“I have a very diverse community, but we’re not integrated. My community has people from all over the world in it, but we don’t go to the same church on Sunday, we don’t shop in the same stores. Even though we live together, we’re still not integrated. We don’t deal with community issues together.”

—PARTICIPANT, HPD-LED CONVERSATION IN SOUTH BROOKLYN



For many, equity matters more than integration.

In discussing their vision for fair housing, many residents focused less on integration and more on equitable access to opportunities and amenities, especially in diverse and non-White neighborhoods. Many New Yorkers living in neighborhoods they consider segregated did not view the lack of racial or ethnic diversity as an issue, and some even framed it as an asset. Instead, they cited the lack of socioeconomic

diversity and investment in their neighborhood as a negative feature.

Many residents discussed how sustainable integration requires tackling inequality head on, arguing that patterns of segregation will continue unless there is equal access to homeownership and economic opportunity regardless of race and ability.

“This is a color-conscious country. So, yes, I want integration because it brings better services. This country is Black and White. I don’t care about integration per se, only if I get benefits that I should have had all along.”

—PARTICIPANT, SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

“Being from the Bronx, nearly all the neighborhoods that I have lived in were exclusively Black and Latino. I don’t think this was a problem. [But] the fact that class or economic diversity didn’t exist in these neighborhoods did limit our community’s offerings and livability.”

—COMMENT, WHERE WE LIVE NYC WEBSITE

“I think there’s something to be said about retaining the culture and uniqueness of communities as they are now. You lose that with integration. If it’s equitable, I don’t think [segregation] is such a bad thing.”

—PARTICIPANT, CHHAYA CDC

PERSPECTIVES ON CONFRONTING SEGREGATION

NYCHA RESIDENTS

Residents in NYCHA have a unique perspective on integration and segregation. Many believe that NYCHA buildings are racially segregated, and that this segregation contributes to stigma and unequal treatment. Residents outside of NYCHA also discussed the demographics and segregation of public housing in their neighborhoods:

“Where I live is just students and professors. Across the street is NYCHA, and it’s like day and night. I didn’t know how segregated New York was until I moved here. People don’t walk on that side of the street. You tend to stick with what you know.”

—PARTICIPANT, MEKONG NYC

Other NYCHA residents, especially those in senior buildings, shared a different perspective, describing how NYCHA successfully brings together residents from diverse backgrounds:

“Before, people lived nearby [in private homes], but they weren’t socially integrated. Now, there is integration on people’s floors—people watch out for each other... We see people that come from all over the world, and we have to learn how to live together.”

—PARTICIPANT, NYCHA PUBLIC HOUSING

But others found the integration within NYCHA developments to be more fraught, expressing resentment against new immigrants or sharing experiences with prejudice:

“The neighbors used to call us ghetto. My next-door neighbor called me an n-word, and they were White people living in the projects.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS

Participating New Yorkers who identify as LGBTQ shared a more expansive vision of integration:

“Diversity is not just about Black and White—it’s about sexual identity and culture. New York City is an accepting city, but some neighborhoods are not.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

For many LGBTQ residents, preferences around integration and segregation are directly connected to feelings of safety. Many shared that certain neighborhoods can feel like unsafe or unwelcoming places to express their gender identity or sexual orientation:

“Being LGBT, I have found it easier to live in a multi-ethnic neighborhood. When I lived in Astoria, I was the only non-Greek, and I would go to coffee shops and they wouldn’t say hello. When I lived in Norwood [in the Bronx], every nationality you can think of was there. You could flirt with different people and it didn’t matter!”

—PARTICIPANT, SAGE ADVOCACY & SERVICES FOR LGBT ELDERLY

Many also expressed wanting to live near other LGBTQ individuals or in LGBTQ-friendly spaces. Overall, LGBTQ residents viewed New York City as much more accepting than other places in the country:

“I came to New York in 1972 and lived in Harlem ever since. I love being a lesbian in New York City because you can be free to be who you are. I can be me in Harlem. If a person asks me my preference, I tell them. Everyone in my neighborhood knows and loves me.”

—PARTICIPANT, SAGE ADVOCACY & SERVICES FOR LGBT ELDERLY



PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Participants with disabilities often discussed integration as something that happens within a building, as well as within a neighborhood. Most shared wanting opportunities to live outside of institutional settings like nursing homes, with neighbors who have a range of abilities. These preferences are often driven by a desire for independence, equity, and safety. As one resident using a wheelchair explained,

“In integrated housing, neighbors will help if I need it.”

—PARTICIPANT, BROOKLYN CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED

Many also shared that effective integration is about increasing awareness, visibility, and inclusion for people with disabilities. A resident with a hearing disability explained how even though she is in an integrated building, she continues to feel separated with different access and treatment:

“I would like more sign language access, more focus on the needs of deaf people, and the integration of all people without marginalization. This means having more groups where we can discuss and talk and learn from another to reach integration.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED NY

Additionally, residents stressed that accessible local businesses and services are critical to inclusive and integrated neighborhoods.

Some participants discussed the importance of having other residents with disabilities in their building or neighborhood for solidarity and increased visibility:

“I want to see more disabled people in the neighborhood so I don’t feel like I’m the only one in a wheelchair.”

—PARTICIPANT, BROOKLYN CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED



Enclaves can offer both opportunities and limitations.

Different ethnic, religious, and immigrant communities across New York City shared a variety of perspectives when it comes to living in enclaves with residents of a similar background. Some depend on enclaves to practice cultural traditions, attend places of worship, shop for specialized goods, or connect with neighbors, employers, and doctors who speak their language. For many, enclaves are also places of security, where they can feel safe and accepted in their neighborhood.

Other residents from these same ethnic, religious, and immigrant communities prefer living in diverse

neighborhoods, often believing that integrated neighborhoods open up more opportunity and economic advancement. A few participating residents, many of them seniors, associated enclaves with exclusion, and they shared experiences of living in enclaves because discrimination left them with no other options. For these residents, integration signals progress and acceptance. Exclusion was also a concern for residents living in enclaves where they do not share the same background as the majority of residents. These residents shared feelings of isolation and challenges with language barriers.

“Living in a neighborhood of opportunity means that we can raise our families according to our cultural values. I want the Bangladeshi community to exist in the future for my children.”

—PARTICIPANT, SAPNA NYC

“Bay Ridge is safe because I can walk freely with my hijab and the community understands my religion.”

—PARTICIPANT, ARAB AMERICAN ASSOCIATION

“When I came to the U.S., I came to experience this culture. When I’m with my community, people like us, I’m not moving forward. New immigrants have to learn from the history and the people [who have been here], and get access to what this country has to offer.”

—PARTICIPANT, CHAYA CDC

“Chinatown comes from segregation. Chinatown should be and already is becoming diverse. There should be White, Black, and Latino people—everyone in the same neighborhood.”

—PARTICIPANT, ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY

Gentrification does not feel like meaningful integration.

For many New Yorkers, especially those in Upper Manhattan and Brooklyn, gentrification is their only experience living in what they consider to be a racially integrated neighborhood, and many are worried about the impact on their communities. Residents reported that the demographic shifts can strain local relationships, as longtime residents and businesses are no longer able to afford to stay and norms regarding culture, policing, gathering, and street life change.

Within these gentrifying neighborhoods, a few residents shared how they welcome the change as a relief from historic patterns of disinvestment, but the majority of participants reported feeling that new amenities are not designed with them in mind—new businesses are too expensive, or improvements are only made near new development. Many longtime residents also expressed frustration that investments were not available before new residents came into the neighborhood.

“My neighborhood looks diverse, but when you analyze it, it is not [diverse] because people are being pushed out. Because the people with power, who actually own in the neighborhood, are not diverse and are trying to push people out, even if they want to stay.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

“People like the idea of diversity, but then they move here and see that we can be loud and play reggae and hip-hop and soca and other mixes all day long. We’re cooking curry with rich smells and spices, but then people will complain that they don’t like the smell of our foods. Diversity is not always the best thing because people don’t know how to live with each other.”

—PARTICIPANT, FLATBUSH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

“Diversity is good, it’s great. It’s a beautiful thing. You can learn so much from different cultures. But there needs to be regulations, because as areas start to change, it gets out of control. People moving in start getting access to resources that the people who have always lived there do not get—like new housing, new parks, new stores, and groceries.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

Integration has the potential to build stronger communities, but it takes work.

Many residents see integration as an opportunity to build tolerance, unity, and solidarity across diverse communities. Many identified that organizing for better local conditions can serve as common ground among diverse residents, bringing people together across racial and ethnic lines, as well as engaging longtime and newer residents in gentrifying communities. Similarly, the Hasidic Jewish and Muslim communities

both identified integration as key to combating hate and educating people about different religions and cultures.

However, most participating residents shared that this vision of integration is aspirational and rarely something they experience in their neighborhoods. Many recognized that time, energy, and resources are required to build trust and relationships at the local level.

“An integrated neighborhood is one where people care. If there is a problem, they will take it up to solve it. People will break down barriers and work together. We need to make sure everybody is helped.”

—PARTICIPANT, HPD-LED CONVERSATION IN SOUTH BROOKLYN

“Living in a diverse neighborhood is great because you get to speak to people you normally wouldn’t come across. You also get to see many cultures and traditions in action.”

—PARTICIPANT, BANANA KELLY CIA

“The fear of unknown is the worst thing. I believe it is very helpful to have an integrated community to learn about others.”

—PARTICIPANT, UNITED JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

“We don’t really know what integrated feels like because everyone is too into themselves. Integration means connection—there are people together as a community, as one.”

—PARTICIPANT, ALI FORNEY CENTER



RESIDENT IDEAS

BUILDING LOCAL TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

SUPPORT LOCAL ORGANIZING to address neighborhood needs through tenant, block, and civic associations.

“We need unity. We also need to be more educated on our tenants’ rights. A lot of us stay quiet and do not know other people who are having similar issues to us.”

— PARTICIPANT, FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE

BUILD TRUST IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS so that local residents are encouraged to get involved and make their voices heard.

“People do not participate in community organizing, including my friends, because they believe the political system failed them.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

BRING YOUNG PEOPLE TOGETHER outside of the classroom to build relationships with residents of different backgrounds at an early age.

INCREASE COMMUNITY BOARD DIVERSITY to ensure diverse voices are included in local leadership.

“We don’t have to be born here to be on the Community Board.”

—PARTICIPANT, CHHAYA

CONNECT THROUGH CELEBRATIONS that bring people out of their homes with block parties, parades, and cookouts. Participants also stressed the need to invest in local gathering spaces like community centers, parks, and gardens.

“True community spaces where different populations can come together and be friendly with each other. It builds morale. Spaces for community—not just for survival, but for celebration.”

—PARTICIPANT, ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

PROMOTE ARTS AND CULTURE as a critical bridge between residents to foster a sense of local identity and discuss tough issues like race.

“Let’s educate ourselves and our young people about this racial history through exhibits and local events.”


—PARTICIPANT, BANANA KELLY

DESIGNATE LOCAL MEDIATORS to connect different communities within a neighborhood, foster understanding between new and old residents, and mediate petty disputes before they escalate.

HOST REGULAR BUILDING AND NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS to help people get to know their neighbors. This is especially important for residents with disabilities, who see their neighbors as key support in case of emergencies, as well as residents in NYCHA who want other local residents to better understand their experience.

“We need more spaces [where] we’re being informed and being taught. Someone can come and realize, ‘Maybe I don’t live in public housing, but I can sympathize with my neighbor because there’s a struggle.’”

—PARTICIPANT, FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE



“If you’re White, you don’t have problems with repairs. If you’re White and your lightbulb is out, they come and fix it. They treat us differently [because] we don’t speak English and we don’t know the country.”

— PARTICIPANT, MINKWON CENTER

WHAT WE LEARNED:

fighting discrimination

More than 50 years after the Fair Housing Act was passed, many New Yorkers still face discrimination when it comes to finding and maintaining their homes.

Recognizing that unequal treatment in the housing market takes many forms, we asked Community Conversation participants to share examples of personal housing challenges and how they navigate them. We also shared information on tenants' rights and resources to combat discrimination.

To address varied housing challenges, it is essential for the City to understand exactly how they play out, what forms discrimination takes, and where there are gaps in fair housing enforcement. The City will use this information to coordinate with other agencies on specific policy recommendations that meaningfully enforce prospective renters' and homeowners' rights.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ACTIVITY

housing challenges in the lives of new yorkers

In each Community Conversation, we invited participating residents to share personal experiences with housing discrimination and other housing challenges, including where they go for help. To ensure residents understood their fair housing rights and legal protections, we started the discussion with some example scenarios.

Across the 62 Community Conversations, experiences related to these four scenarios were discussed most frequently:

1. Challenges related to repairs and poor conditions
2. Discrimination during the housing search process based on race or another characteristic
3. Discrimination based on legal source of income, including using a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher or City program to pay for rent
4. Discrimination based on children or plans to have children in the future

Housing discrimination remains a major challenge for New Yorkers.

Participating New Yorkers shared detailed accounts of discrimination by landlords, brokers, and other real estate professionals when trying to find housing, illustrating that discrimination is still a widespread practice that limits housing options.

Despite legal protections, residents reported facing explicit discrimination when looking for housing for themselves and their families. Residents also shared a range of indirect or masked forms of discrimination. Landlords and

brokers leave calls unanswered, provide incorrect or misleading information about apartment availability, or use inconsistent fees, credit checks, or income thresholds to limit who has access to housing. Discrimination is especially challenging for residents with multiple characteristics protected by fair housing law—for example, people of color with children trying to use rental assistance, or seniors with a disability and limited English proficiency.

“I am Black. I was filling out apartment applications and I was making a good amount of money. The application was filled out, but I didn’t fill out race. When I would check ‘Black’ on the application, I wouldn’t hear anything. So when I got to the apartment, I saw the expression on the landlord’s face, and then I would hear every excuse under the sun: needed more proof of income, work, and so on. You start to give up. I would come with money in my hand to try and show them I was reliable. You feel it, you know the racial discrimination exists, but it can be incredibly hard to prove.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

“We tried to buy a house. My husband agreed with the owner of the house about everything, but when the owner saw me, and saw my hijab, he canceled the deal and refused to sell us the house.”

—PARTICIPANT, ARAB AMERICAN ASSOCIATION

“I wanted to pursue a housing lead but the broker said she would not deal with me after I disclosed that I had a voucher. She had been nice before, but after that she stormed out.”

—PARTICIPANT, SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

Fighting discrimination also means fighting the unequal treatment of tenants.

Fair housing enforcement often focuses on the search for housing, but New Yorkers made clear that discrimination and unfair treatment also occur frequently outside of the housing search process, in interactions with landlords and management as a tenant. Residents shared experiences of mistreatment that include poor or no repairs, racist comments, overcharged rent, sexual harassment, physical violence, or intimidation—including landlords threatening unjustified calls to the police or Child Protective Services.

Residents reported that they are often targeted because of their identity—they are a person of color, undocumented, transgender, a single-mother, a voucher holder, a senior, or someone with a disability. In many instances, there was a clear connection to fair housing protections. Harassment also came up as a tactic used to evict or disempower residents in naturally affordable or rent-stabilized units.

“Twice I gave my management proof of DRIE [Disability Rent Increase Exemption program, which is available to people with disabilities in rent-regulated and other eligible apartments] and they tried to intimidate me. I got a notice saying that I owed them \$2,000. I have all my paperwork and receipts to say that I am compliant with my rent. I know that I am not being treated well.”

—PARTICIPANT, BROOKLYN CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED

“My landlord told me that he received a letter that ICE [US Immigration and Customs Enforcement] was coming to inspect all apartments. I asked him to see the letter and he refused. I was being threatened because my landlord wanted me to vacate my unit.”

—PARTICIPANT, MAKE THE ROAD



Stigma and bias are especially challenging for residents using government housing programs.

Many participants shared how they face stigma living in NYCHA or using rental assistance and how their association with these government programs heightens the discrimination they face in the housing search process. The experiences of participants illustrate how negative bias about poverty,

often reinforced by racism, can limit residents' access to housing and other opportunities. Many described feeling that landlords, brokers, neighbors, and sometimes even case managers and support staff working for the City treat them like criminals.

“I live in a shelter, and we called and called and nobody takes vouchers. They think because you’re homeless you’re dirty and uneducated, and you’ll bring insects and roaches. They think you can’t hold a job. A voucher has the stigma of poverty.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED NY

“What I don’t like about affordable housing is the stigma that you get. Especially as a woman of color you have to rise above it, and you can’t always do that. You go to a real estate [broker] with a voucher and they turn you away. It’s not fair that I walk in to a place and I’m Black, and the woman next to me is White, and I’m treated like a criminal.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

“When we moved, the landlord told us he would not take any vouchers or any kind of government subsidy. He said he didn’t want ‘those kinds of people here.’”

—PARTICIPANT, MAKE THE ROAD

“People should look at NYCHA residents and see people as people. We are working and contributing to the community.”

—PARTICIPANT, HPD-LED CONVERSATION IN SOUTH BROOKLYN

Enforcement processes often leave residents feeling powerless.

Many participating residents expressed that the power dynamic between tenants and landlords leaves them feeling trapped and helpless in the face of discrimination and harassment. Many choose not to report bad behavior because they fear retaliation or have concerns about finding a new home with the limited affordable housing options in New York City's competitive market. Tenants facing mistreatment often compromise by putting up

with subpar conditions or abusive landlords, roommates, and neighbors.

Residents who reported taking action often found enforcement processes to be slow, time consuming, and confusing. Furthermore, residents shared concerns that even if they successfully win in Housing Court or get the City to impose a fine, the consequences are too minimal to meaningfully change how landlords do business.

“We called 311 for heat and hot water but it doesn’t really work. They won’t return your call until two to three weeks down the line. There’s very poor communication, and we don’t know what’s happening right after we call. There’s no acknowledgement that they received the complaint.”

—PARTICIPANT, FLATBUSH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

“What is the purpose of the Fair Housing Act if there is such a bureaucratic process to go through that it does not benefit the person who needs help? I was living in an apartment and had a stroke. I couldn’t walk. Insurance gave me a motorized wheelchair, but I couldn’t get it into the apartment because it was not handicap accessible. I went through a lot of court procedures, spoke to lawyers. In the end, it was the landlord’s discretion because if he wanted to sell the building, the ramp could impact the cost. The court was going back and forth. I got fed up and just gave up. It seems like they know that people will get tired of fighting.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

RESIDENT IDEAS

IMPROVING FAIR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT

EXPAND PROTECTIONS

so that criminal background, credit score, and Housing Court records do not serve as barriers to accessing housing. There were also calls to protect residents who do report from retaliation by landlords.

EXPAND RENT

CONTROL to ensure the private market works for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. There were calls for universal rent control, the expansion of existing rent laws, and stronger protections for current rent-regulated apartments.

FOCUS ON PROACTIVE

ENFORCEMENT to ensure accountability and oversight, taking the burden off of tenants to report bad behavior and pursue justice. Ideas include randomized inspection protocols, increased fair housing testing, and affirmative legal action by government against landlords. The call for proactive enforcement was especially prevalent among residents using rental assistance, who feel they have no backing to ensure programs like Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and City-administered programs like CityFHEPS would be accepted by landlords.

INVEST IN COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

so that residents, local organizations, and frontline government staff know tenants' rights and how to take action. When participating residents reported victories on fair housing and tenant protections, it was always because of the help of a dedicated community-based organization.

INCREASE PENALTIES

for bad actors, including higher fines and stricter consequences for landlords and other real estate professionals who violate fair housing law, harass tenants, and fail to make needed repairs.

"I think local governments have to do more to protect tenants. There have to be real penalties for landlords who intentionally harass and abuse tenants in their buildings."

—PARTICIPANT, MAKE THE ROAD

"I found Make the Road and got access to a lawyer. I was taught my rights and realized that if I gave up my rent-stabilized apartment, I likely would not be able to find another one. I decided to stay and fight my landlord. We won."

—PARTICIPANT, MAKE THE ROAD

IMPROVE HOUSING

COURT to ensure access to justice. Residents shared a deep mistrust of the Housing Court system and see it as a tool used by landlords to evict tenants, rather than a place for residents to fight for their rights. Suggestions for reform include education for residents on how to prepare for and navigate court, free representation for cases being brought against landlords, and addressing inefficiencies in the system that lead to drawn-out cases demanding time and persistence that many residents cannot afford

"I went and met with [the NYC Human Rights Commission]. But I did not pursue a case because I did not want to create issues. I would have had to show up many times, and it is hard to fight a case."

—PARTICIPANT, SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

REGULATE BROKER AND OTHER RENTAL APPLICATION FEES

to ensure they are not a barrier to low-income tenants seeking housing. This could include reimbursement programs for fees and security deposits, as well as opportunities to better train and incentivize brokers to work with voucher holders, people with disabilities, and other populations who routinely face discrimination.

"There are application fees for apartments, and some people may not have [the money]. I'm trying to get an apartment, but it's hard and you don't get your fee back [when you're not approved]."

—PARTICIPANT, NYC FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

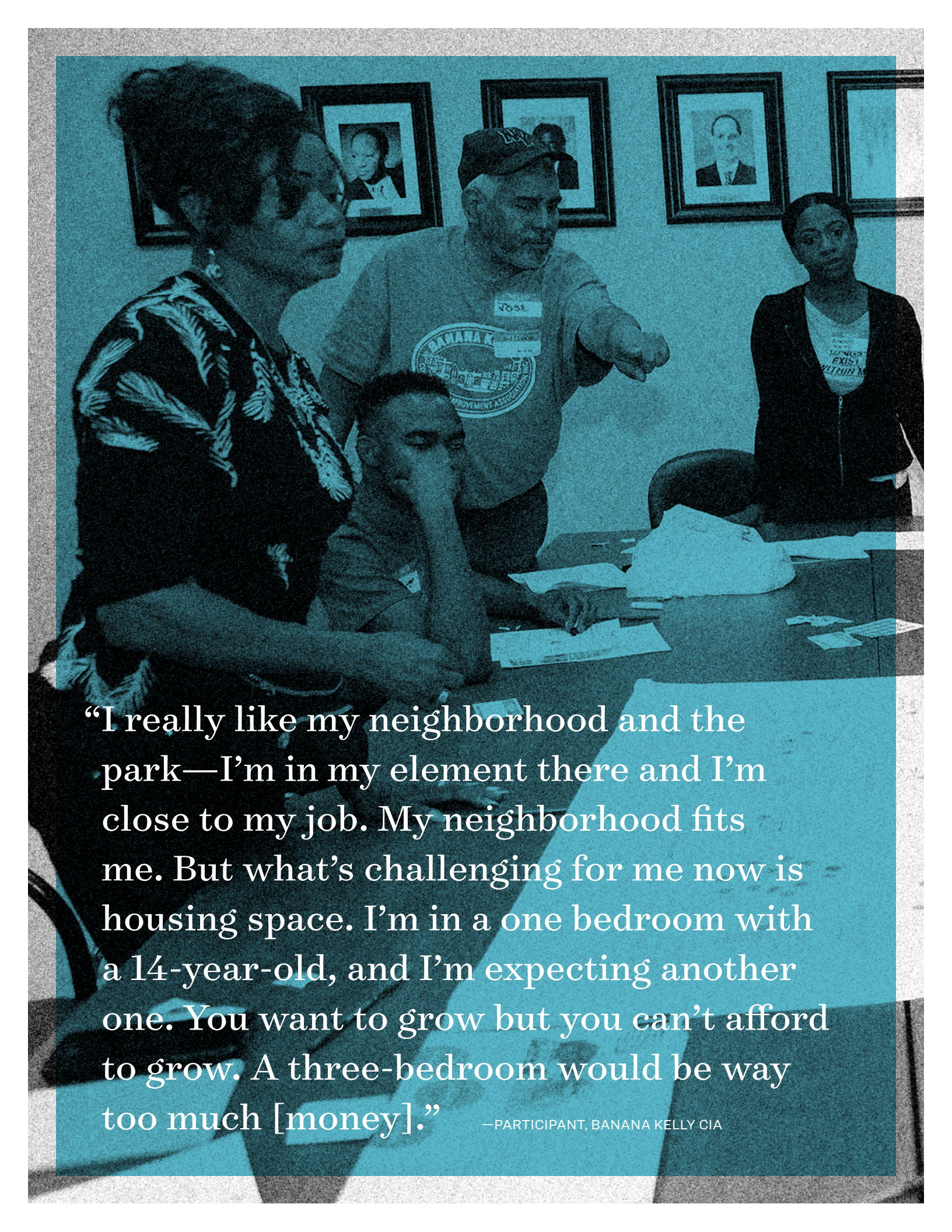
STREAMLINE PROCESSES

to ensure tenant complaints are efficiently addressed, including expedited timelines as well as better communication during the process. Specifically for 311, there is a lot of confusion and concern about whether complaints are actually being received and limited clarity on what residents need to do in order to move the process forward.

“[Many immigrants] are okay to have the bare minimum. They don’t realize that housing quality is important and they deserve it. Many stay in crappy conditions and don’t know how to advocate for themselves.”

—PARTICIPANT, MEKONG NYC



A photograph of a group of people in a meeting room. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top, is seated and looking towards the right. Behind her, a man in a grey t-shirt and a baseball cap is standing and pointing his right hand towards the right. To the right, another woman is seated, looking towards the center. The background wall is light blue and features several framed portraits of men. The overall image has a teal tint.

“I really like my neighborhood and the park—I’m in my element there and I’m close to my job. My neighborhood fits me. But what’s challenging for me now is housing space. I’m in a one bedroom with a 14-year-old, and I’m expecting another one. You want to grow but you can’t afford to grow. A three-bedroom would be way too much [money].”

—PARTICIPANT, BANANA KELLY CIA

WHAT WE LEARNED:

promoting housing choice

The City is seeking to increase opportunity for all New Yorkers by promoting housing choice: the choice to move into a different neighborhood or the choice to stay in a neighborhood, even as it changes.

The Community Conversations surfaced detailed information about why New Yorkers live in their neighborhoods and where they may want to move. The experiences shared by residents illustrated a clear lack of choice for low income New Yorkers, since the majority reported ending up in neighborhoods due to forces outside of their control, such as affordability, discrimination, or government housing programs. This information will help the City develop policies to better support New Yorkers in making the housing choice that is best for themselves, their families, and their communities.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ACTIVITY

what's impacting neighborhood choice?

In each Community Conversation, residents selected the reasons why they currently live where they live, whether they want to stay or move, and the key tradeoffs and reasons driving that choice.

WHY DO YOU LIVE IN YOUR CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD?

Top answers:

"Affordability" or "Availability of subsidized housing" (NYCHA, housing supported by HPD)
"Ease of transportation"
"Family and community" or
"Sense of belonging"

FOR THOSE WHO WANTED TO STAY, WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON FOR STAYING IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

Top answers:

"Family and community" or "Sense of belonging"
"Affordability" or "Availability of subsidized housing" (NYCHA, housing supported by HPD)

FOR THOSE WHO WANTED TO MOVE, WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON FOR MOVING TO ANOTHER NEIGHBORHOOD?

Top answers:

"Environment" (green space, air quality)
"Family and community" or
"Sense of belonging"
"Housing conditions" (housing quality, landlord relationship, apartment size)
"Safety"

DO YOU WANT TO STAY IN YOUR CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD, OR MOVE TO ANOTHER ONE?

Stay: 55%

Move: 45%

Few New Yorkers feel like they have meaningful options when choosing a home or neighborhood because of the high cost of housing.

Most residents who participated in the Community Conversations are low-income and reported that the high cost of housing in New York City dramatically limits their choice of homes and neighborhoods. Instead, residents reported compromising with poor conditions and overcrowding, or limiting their housing search to neighborhoods that feel unsafe or have underperforming schools.

Residents also shared that they rely heavily on government housing programs, including the shelter

system, in order to survive in a market that feels too expensive. Housing choice is particularly limited for seniors and people with disabilities, who often need homes that are accessible and affordable on a fixed income, like Social Security. Affordability is a heightened concern for single parents, those involved with the criminal justice system, LGBTQ individuals, undocumented immigrants, and other residents earning low wages or facing discrimination in the job market.

“Affordability dictates everything. The conversation with clients is about where they can afford to live, and then we plan for safety afterwards. Same with school quality—my clients would love to live in a place with good school quality, but they can’t afford it. There is a hierarchy of needs. You can’t even get to other needs or wants, because first you have to live in a place you can afford.”

—SERVICE PROVIDER,
ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

“My coworker says, ‘Why would anyone want to live in the projects?’ And I say, ‘Where else am I going to live?’ My mom is disabled so she can’t work and also she has a lot of us. It’s hard. We would be homeless otherwise. People live where they can afford to live.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR
COURT INNOVATION

A lack of housing choice impacts the most fundamental details of New Yorkers' lives.

For many New Yorkers, the lack of housing choice has a fundamental impact on their lives—from day-to-day behaviors to planning for the future. Residents shared the high stress and sacrifice that results from having little or no access to safe, quality, and affordable housing:

- A couple using a housing voucher could not find a quality apartment with enough room, so they postponed having children.
- A single mother got pneumonia because of poor heating in her apartment but was afraid to make a complaint because she was undocumented.
- A young immigrant moved five times in three years—once living in a windowless basement—in order to afford rent.
- A transgender person feared for their safety because they could not receive gender-affirming surgery since they did not have the required stable housing available for post-surgery care.
- In order to prepare fresh food for her family, a voucher holder reported that she began barbecuing on the sidewalk outside her apartment after the landlord refused to fix her stove.
- A disabled 89-year-old took over an hour to get up the stairs each day because their rent-stabilized building had no elevator but was all they could afford.

In addition to housing challenges, many residents reported regularly travelling far distances because their neighborhood lacks quality employment, schooling, doctors, or groceries.

“In Far Rockaway you’re so isolated at times. In the snowstorm we had, the buses and trains weren’t running, and you’re stuck here. During a storm like Sandy, you’re really stuck. I want to move for a better life for the kids.”

—PARTICIPANT, SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM



Family, community, and sense of belonging play a major role in where people live.

New Yorkers from across Community Conversations stressed the importance of living near family and community. These local relationships can serve as key support systems—neighbors provide childcare, local businesses offer free food during hard times, and houses of worship support job and apartment searches. Recent immigrants, in particular, rely on family and community as they build a new life in New York City, and many have limited awareness of housing options beyond their immediate neighborhood.

Living near family and community also contributed to residents

feeling safe and welcomed in their neighborhoods. Many residents of color shared concerns about discomfort, discrimination, or mistreatment when living in predominately White areas, and prefer to live near family members or in more diverse communities where they have a stronger sense of belonging. Residents of color also reported that they feel they have fewer options because of past and current norms about who is welcome where and how neighborhoods are monitored and policed.

“I want to stay in Bay Ridge because I want to be connected to my community, and when I am sick there will be someone here to be with me.”

—PARTICIPANT, ARAB AMERICAN ASSOCIATION

“We used to live in Manhattan, but my mom and dad wanted more diversity. They wanted me and my brother to grow up somewhere where I wouldn’t be treated differently. That’s why I live in Jamaica.”

—PARTICIPANT, ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY

“White people can move to wherever they want and people of color can only move between East New York and the Bronx.”

—PARTICIPANT, FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE

Government housing programs can have a limiting impact on neighborhood choice.

Government housing programs—including NYCHA, rental assistance programs, supportive housing, and HPD-funded housing—provide positive, even transformative, opportunities for many New Yorkers. Many residents described these programs as a pathway out of homelessness, or a chance for true housing stability. However, residents also reported that participating in these programs can mean losing the opportunity to choose their neighborhood—prioritizing an affordable apartment, regardless of location. This can mean moving away from friends and family, or moving into neighborhoods with fewer resources.

Once they moved in, some participants reported feeling stuck with no pathway for leaving housing programs—particularly NYCHA—because of the lack of affordability in the housing market. Designed to provide more choice in the housing market, rental assistance programs can also be challenging to use. Residents reported feeling “quarantined” in certain neighborhoods due to discrimination, voucher payment limits, and red tape for voucher holders as well as landlords.

“The City’s voucher is so limiting. You can’t leave the city, and also the amount of the voucher keeps your search incredibly closed. There is almost nothing but rooms available in the voucher price range. Now the cost of rooms has gone up to the point that the voucher will barely cover that. The agencies that make these programs do not support them. They make [the vouchers] worthless.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

“The first apartment I got [through HPD’s housing lottery] was in Manhattan. I didn’t have a choice about it because it was subsidized housing. I had to go where the housing was due to accessibility and affordability. So, I had to break off everything I had in Brooklyn and start over with friends, doctors, and everything. I did give that up but I got more in return.”

—PARTICIPANT, BROOKLYN CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED

“I can’t leave NYCHA. Right now, at end of pay week, I have \$200-\$300 after rent. And if I moved, I would only have \$5 left. I would go hungry in a nice apartment.”

—PARTICIPANT, NYCHA PUBLIC HOUSING

“The only apartments available are in the Bronx, which is a very desolate place. Why do they want to place all the poor people in the Bronx? I want more Section 8 listings available where I can find them. Right now, giving me a voucher is like giving me the key to a Volkswagen and saying, ‘Go find the car!’”

—PARTICIPANT, SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

RESIDENT IDEAS IMPROVING HOUSING PROGRAMS

INVEST IN QUALITY STAFFING, SERVICE DELIVERY, AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

across all programs to ensure that participating residents and landlords—in the case of rental assistance programs—receive timely, accurate, and consistent support..

“How quickly you connect to appropriate housing should not depend on how lucky you are, or how familiar your housing specialist is with the system. There should be appropriate staffing and the right ratio of 1-on-1 time in a regular way.”

—SERVICE PROVIDER, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

REDUCE COMPETITION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

to eliminate incentives for landlords to favor one form of government assistance over another.

“The landlord has a shelter program in his building that pays more rent, so he’s trying to kick out the people in the non-shelter program. Some people left, but I decided to stay. Now they have begun to harass us.”

—PARTICIPANT, BANANA KELLY CIA

EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS MORE AFFORDABLE

by advocating to reduce rental contributions in government housing to less than 30-35% of gross income, creating more opportunities for residents with disabilities to deduct medical costs, and expanding emergency rental and utility assistance programs that help residents avoid eviction.

“I don’t want to be rent burdened. I want to have a life. I want to have disposable income at the end of the month. I want to do things after I pay my bills. That’s your ability to buy food, buy clothing, and not live paycheck to paycheck.”

—PARTICIPANT, BANANA KELLY CIA

IMPROVE LANGUAGE AND DISABILITY ACCESS

to ensure all residents can apply for, navigate, and live comfortably in government-assisted housing.

“After filling out the Housing Connect form [for HPD’s housing lottery] and marking that I was deaf, I showed up to the interview for the apartment and no interpreter was provided.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED NY

ENSURE RESIDENTS OF GOVERNMENT HOUSING PROGRAMS FEEL VALUED AND EMPOWERED

in their interactions with government. This includes training and protocols to ensure that stigma, bias, and discrimination are not perpetuated within government agencies. As one resident shared, “stop making people who are not making enough money feel lazy and less of a person.” Another resident in supportive housing talked about her negative interactions with police:

“I want police to be community partners, to protect us. They think that supportive housing is just for people right out of jail and you must accept that there’s crime in the building. They think if you live here, that you should just take it. ‘Didn’t you know what you were getting yourself into?’”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED NY

EXPAND INVESTMENTS IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

including housing for extremely low-income individuals who have limited options in a high-cost market and in government housing programs. There was also a call for more emergency, supportive, and specialized housing for justice-involved and LGBTQ individuals.

EXPAND MARKETING FOR NEW IMMIGRANTS

to ensure they know about government housing programs and how to apply, including clarifying eligibility for undocumented immigrants.

“Since I’m a new immigrant, I was not aware of subsidized housing or temporary shelters.”

—PARTICIPANT, CHHAYA

MAKE IT EASIER TO APPLY FOR HOUSING

by creating a centralized place to apply for different programs, investing in community-based organizations that connect residents to services, and clarifying the application and waitlist processes.

homelessness and shelters

INCREASE THE QUALITY AND SAFETY of shelters to ensure that all residents can successfully access the support they need without fear of violence, especially for transgender and gender nonconforming individuals.

REFORM SHELTER PLACEMENT POLICY to keep families in their community and give impacted residents more agency to choose where they live. Residents reported that proximity to community and social networks helps students stay in school and makes it easier for shelter residents to secure permanent housing back in their former neighborhood.

“In shelter, people have no choice. They will not let you go where you want to go, and will not let you transfer. The system is so inefficient and people don’t listen or understand. You are not looked at as an individual.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

STREAMLINE THE PROCESS to get people into housing faster with less red tape, especially for residents involved with the criminal justice system and for LGBTQ individuals who reported unique safety concerns in the shelter system.

affordable housing programs

REWORK ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS TO HAVE LESS RIGID INCOME CUTOFFS, especially for certain populations with high housing needs, such as people with disabilities. One resident shared how her friend with a mobility disability was \$5 away from the income threshold and was denied an accessible apartment.

CONDUCT TIGHTER OVERSIGHT OF LEASING, including providing a hotline to report perceived discrimination and ensuring that limited accessible apartments are awarded to people with disabilities on the first and subsequent rent-ups.

PROVIDE MORE OPTIONS AND LARGER UNIT SIZES FOR UNIQUE HOUSEHOLD ARRANGEMENTS like large or intergenerational families and individuals with in-home caretakers, including seniors and people with disabilities.

ADD PREFERENCES IN HPD’S HOUSING LOTTERY FOR CURRENT NYCHA RESIDENTS AND RESIDENTS USING RENTAL ASSISTANCE to support mobility and choice:

“The City should provide preferences for NYCHA residents to move to other affordable units if they want to. Most new housing is not affordable for extremely low-income people living in NYCHA.”

—PARTICIPANT, FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE

NYCHA

ADDRESS POLICIES RELATED TO FAMILY RE-ENTRY FROM THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Many residents shared that it is unfair to permanently exclude residents based on low-level drug offenses and to punish families by not allowing the return of loved ones.

“During the crack epidemic they made the ‘zero tolerance’ rules. They wanted parents to sign a probation paper saying you wouldn’t let your kid back into the apartment if they smoked even a single joint. Let’s bring back people who were kicked out of NYCHA for drug offenses now that marijuana is decriminalized in New York City.”

—PARTICIPANT, FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE

EMPOWER NYCHA RESIDENTS through improved tenant leadership structures and education, expanded right to counsel, and better utilization of NYCHA outdoor and community spaces.

REFORM NYCHA ADMISSIONS, TRANSFER, AND SUCCESSION PROTOCOLS to streamline processes and give residents more choice and agency, including changes to borough-wide preferences that currently do not give residents the option to live near family and community.

PROVIDE MORE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR NYCHA TENANTS—including residents with mental health challenges, survivors of domestic violence, and formerly homeless households—to ensure they have the care they need to thrive and so that fellow residents do not serve as de-facto case workers.

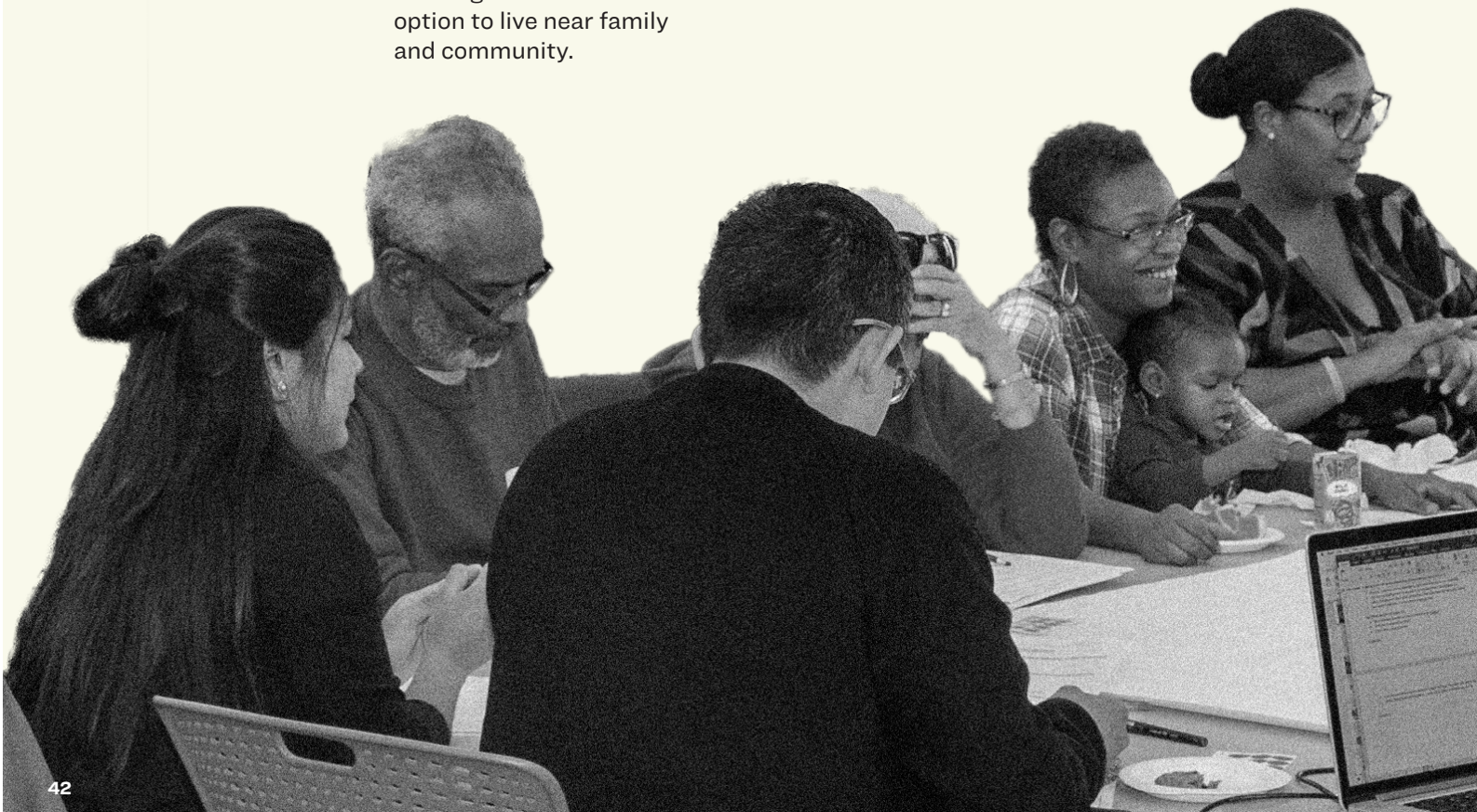
“Unfortunately, there is usually an adverse reaction to mental health issues when you don’t have proper responses in place. Why would they move someone into the apartments without social assistance, and they have one of their attacks? If there’s no social support, it can disrupt the whole building.”

—PARTICIPANT, NYCHA PUBLIC HOUSING

IMPROVE BUILDING CONDITIONS AT NYCHA and provide timelier, more effective repairs to ensure residents can live in safe and quality housing.

“I have mold in my apartment and I’ve been living in NYCHA for four years. Every time they come they just paint and it comes back. I was given a ticket and they were supposed to show up. I stayed home two days and they never came.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION



rental assistance programs

IMPROVE THE MARKETING OF VOUCHERS AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS TO LANDLORDS

to increase the supply of participating properties, including government outreach and coaching for residents using rental assistance programs on how to best present their program to potential landlords.

“They say, ‘No programs. No vouchers.’ Actually, that’s kind of strange that they don’t want that. That’s guaranteed rent. They say because the City takes too long and they feel they’re going to get undesirable tenants. We need to better market ourselves.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

IMPROVE THE SUPPORT OFFERED IN THE HOUSING SEARCH PROCESS, including expanding onboarding programs, more targeted coaching on neighborhood choice, and assistance identifying and reporting source of income discrimination.

“People get vouchers for housing and do not know what to do with them. They do not have any support in finding homes with their voucher. When they work with brokers, they often face discrimination because they are young, homeless, and LGBTQ. They don’t know how to look for housing on their own—that type of support would be helpful.”

—SERVICE PROVIDER, ALI FORNEY CENTER

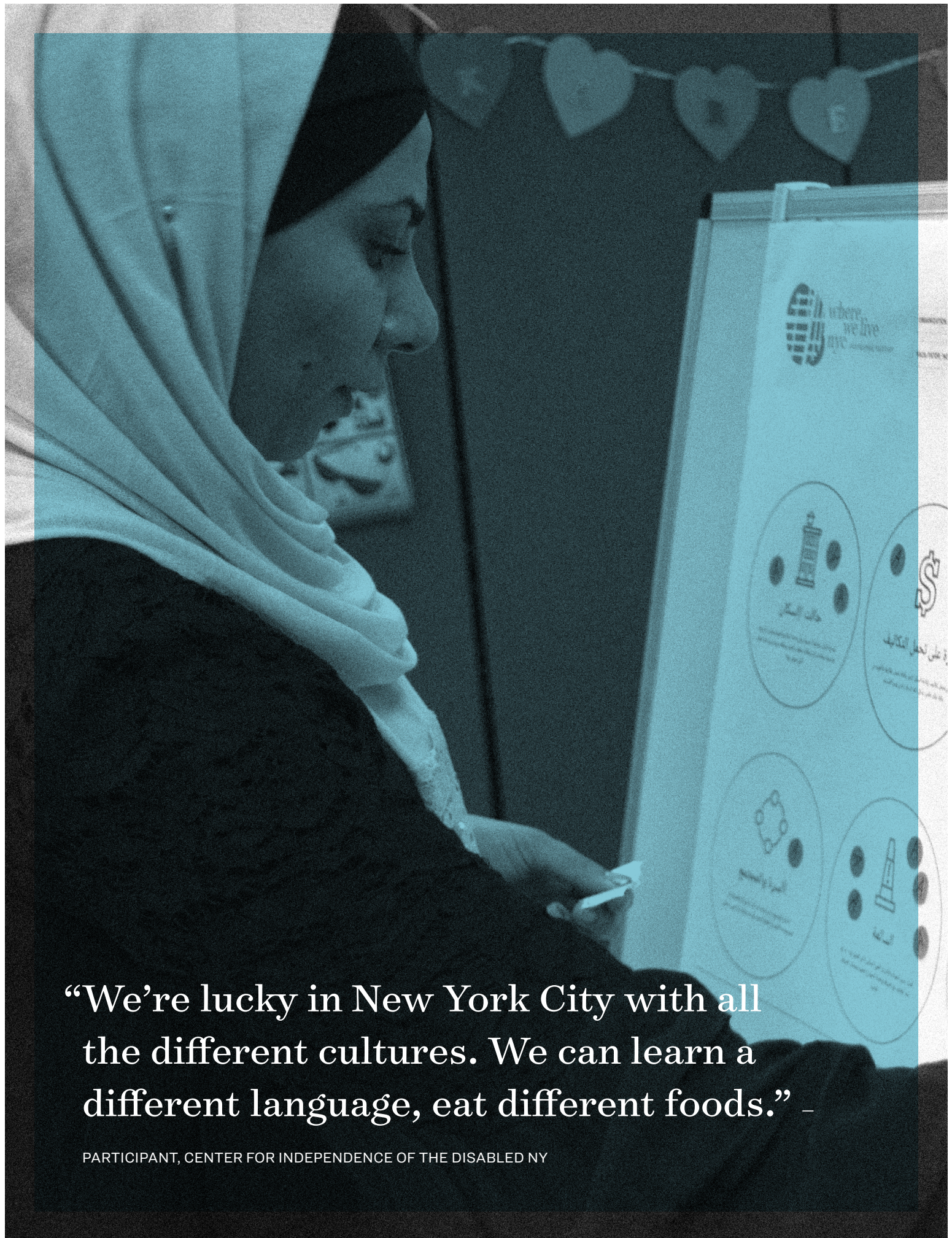
REFORM HARMFUL PROTOCOLS THAT CAN HURT RESIDENTS USING RENTAL ASSISTANCE, including time limitations during the housing search process and inspection protocols for voucher holders. Many participants believe the current inspection protocol does little to ensure quality housing conditions and fails to hold landlords accountable for repairs, instead putting the onus on tenants to go through eviction proceedings or quickly secure new housing.

MAKE RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS MORE COMPETITIVE by increasing payment amounts, promoting opportunities for using rental assistance programs to move out of New York City, removing the time-bound nature of City rental assistance, or adding more incentives for lease renewals.

“The City needs to strengthen the voucher program. The amount of the voucher is so low it is ineffective. There are no apartments in the price range at all. I have been looking for over a year and a half, and the only landlords and brokers in my price range are predators.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER





“We’re lucky in New York City with all the different cultures. We can learn a different language, eat different foods.” –

PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED NY

WHAT WE LEARNED:

increasing access to opportunity

From jobs and transit to cultural institutions and universities, New York is a city of opportunity. However, there exist deep disparities in everything from wealth to life expectancy as a result of historic and present-day injustices.

During neighborhood-based Community Conversations, New Yorkers discussed how forces like gentrification, integration, and housing choice affect their access to resources and opportunity. They also shared what makes a neighborhood great.

This feedback will inform the City's policy approach as it works to provide investments and resources to neighborhoods for residents to thrive.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ACTIVITY

what makes a neighborhood great?

In each Community Conversation, residents shared their favorite neighborhood and the reasons why they want to live there. Here are some top themes that emerged when participants discussed what makes a neighborhood a good place to live:

1. **LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS**—including friends, family, and friendly neighbors
2. **PERSONAL HISTORY AND FAMILIARITY**
3. **EASE OF GETTING AROUND**—including subways, buses, bikes, parking, and walkability
4. **ACCESS TO CRITICAL SERVICES**—including convenient employment, healthcare, and community-based service providers
5. **GOOD FOOD AND RESTAURANTS**
6. **ACCESS TO PARKS, GREEN SPACE, AND NATURE**
7. **DIVERSITY OF RESIDENTS**
8. **SAFETY**—including LGBTQ-friendly spaces
9. **QUIET**
10. **CULTURE**—including history and atmosphere

New York City offers unparalleled opportunities.

Many participating residents discussed how New York City offers them opportunities that they could not find living anywhere else. Residents celebrate the strong public benefits, access to good education, and welcoming neighborhoods filled with diverse cultures and identities. From LGBTQ individuals to immigrants, residents came to

New York City to find acceptance and build a better life. For longtime residents, being a New Yorker is a part of their identity and they have no desire to call another place home. New York City's unique opportunity and diversity motivate residents to stay and contribute to making their neighborhoods better.

“New York City is the only city that has a 24/7, 365 days a year transit system.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

“Because of my color as a Black male, I might not be safe in other places outside of New York.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

“Growing up in the segregated South, I was always taught in my mother and father’s house. It was education, but it was nothing like the free education at City College. New York is opportunity. I came from the South and I worked my way up for 30 years. They don’t have that in the South. Here if you want something bad enough, you can work hard and get it. God bless New York City.”

—PARTICIPANT, SAGE ADVOCACY & SERVICES FOR LGBT ELDER



Deep inequalities exist in how New Yorkers access opportunity.

Participating residents discussed in great detail how investments from government and the private sector may vary dramatically across neighborhoods. Many shared how historic and present-day racism impact who has access to opportunity perceived that neighborhoods with more White residents often have more wealth, investment, and higher-quality amenities.

New Yorkers also discussed how neighborhood change, gentrification, and the influx of wealthier residents

quickly shift the landscape of opportunity in a given neighborhood, bringing amenities and attention to areas—primarily communities of color—that have been long neglected. In some instances, residents reported that these changes lead to better amenities for everyone. But often there is a more complex dynamic, where gentrification can lead to displacement, fear of displacement, and unequal access to opportunity for different residents, even within the same neighborhood.

“I live in Queens. All the other boroughs are not taken care of as much as Manhattan. I want the City to care about this neighborhood as much as I do.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED NY

“Even as our neighborhood gets more diverse, we are not getting the same things, especially in NYCHA. On our side, where the projects are, there’s nothing developed over there. There are no benches. There’s not enough light. There are no trees planted there. The ‘beautification’ projects and the development of new green space are one-sided.”

—PARTICIPANT, HPD-LED CONVERSATION IN SOUTH BROOKLYN

“When neighborhoods are more diverse, they become safer. More police come in and things start to get cleaned up. You see the streets getting paved, empty stores filling with businesses, better garbage pickup. At the same time, they also make it more expensive. It makes life harder for the people who lived there first because they start to get priced out. I love all the changes that happen to the neighborhood but I want to be able to enjoy them. I don’t want to have to leave once things start getting nicer.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

a closer look at how New Yorkers experience five key areas of opportunity

TRANSIT AND CONNECTIONS TO OPPORTUNITY

AN ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE SYSTEM

Residents discussed how they rely heavily on public transit to connect them with jobs and amenities not available in their neighborhoods. However, residents reported that the amount of transit options and quality of transit vary significantly across communities. Many low-income communities in the outer-boroughs reported less frequent and reliable service, even though they often have the longest commutes and highest need to access critical services.

“The Bronx is an under-served borough. For instance this bus right here. Everyone pays the same amount of money to ride the bus, but the bus is never here when it’s supposed to be. I have to wait half an hour. This is an area where everyone needs a bus to go to court or get their benefits. People are paying the same amount as in Manhattan [where there is] better service.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

SUPPORTING UNCONVENTIONAL COMMUTERS

Residents with unconventional work schedules who are commuting outside of traditional office hours are disproportionately low-income residents of color, and many shared concerns about safety and reliability of public transit. One Section 8 voucher holder in the Rockaways was a home health aide with late-night hours. After a few negative experiences where she was followed and harassed waiting for the train late at night, she decided to lease a car in order to get to work safely. However, she explained that the lease is difficult to afford, and as a result she is struggling to keep up with rent.

AN ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE SYSTEM

Residents with disabilities and seniors called for meaningful accessibility improvements across the transit system, including ensuring elevators at every station, better protocol on buses, and improving Access-A-Ride services and alternatives.

“Access-a-Ride is horrible. I have sat in the snow for an hour waiting for it. I think it’s very unfair that they will wait only five minutes for you, but they can be half an hour or an hour late.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

AFFORDABLE REGIONAL TRANSIT IS KEY TO HOUSING CHOICE

The lack of public transit came up as a barrier when residents discussed moving or accessing resources outside of New York City. Many residents reported being unable to afford a car or rely on local and regional systems to get around.

“I don’t have a car. A lot of New Yorkers don’t. I couldn’t afford a car with monthly insurance. Brownsville is the ghetto but we have all major forms of transportation here. If one thing is not running, you can take something else.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON SAFETY

SAFETY IS ABOUT IDENTITY

Residents discussed being harassed for wearing a hijab or for being openly transgender. Residents of color worry about being unjustly reported to the police in predominately White or gentrifying neighborhoods, and undocumented immigrants fear being picked up by or reported to federal authorities. Survivors of domestic violence have their own calculations around safety, making hard tradeoffs between avoiding their abuser and staying plugged into important local support networks. For many of these residents, access to safety and security never feels easy or guaranteed because of their identity and experiences.

“My [transgender and gender nonconforming] clients have to plan their route for safety when they leave their house. ‘Can I get from home and walk even a block safely?’ One recent client was worried about public transit—being aware of how close they were to the tracks for fear of being pushed. They have slurs written on their apartment doors and mailboxes. Safety is a huge concern.”

—SERVICE PROVIDER, ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

FEELING STUCK IN UNSAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

Many residents reported having to compromise on safety in order to find affordable housing options. This is especially true for NYCHA residents and residents using rental assistance who frequently reported frustration with crime and drugs in their neighborhood.

“I know it’s a bad area, so I try to plan trips for my daughters to show them what else there is. My goal is to save enough money to take them out of the hood, get a better education.”

—PARTICIPANT, NYCHA PUBLIC HOUSING

DIVERGENT VIEWPOINTS ON POLICING

When discussing neighborhood safety, residents were torn. Some called for increased responsiveness and presence from the police, while others shared feeling less safe when police are around. Many residents want more local officers who know the neighborhood, culture, and language.

“I want a community that is safe and free of racial profiling. A place where the police are held accountable and there is also a more amicable relationship between the police and the community. Where police are part of the community.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

COMMUNITY TIES MEAN SAFER STREETS

At the neighborhood level, many residents discussed how local relationships are critical to their sense of safety:

“I currently live on City Island [in the Bronx]. I moved there three years ago because there had been shootouts where I was before. Now there’s a sense of community with the row houses, and people look out for each other.”

—PARTICIPANT, BANANA KELLY CIA

PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY DIFFER

Residents also acknowledged that even in the same neighborhoods, different New Yorkers may experience safety differently, often based on race and local relationships.

“I know everyone in my community. I know my block. Safety comes from family and sense of community. When outsiders walk there, they get scared. But I’m scared when other people come in. Safety is not related to police. If the police are present then I get scared. Even when people talk to the police, there aren’t successful outcomes. Racism defines differences in perceptions of safety.”

—PARTICIPANT, MEKONG NYC

UNDERSTANDING HEALTH AND HOUSING

COMMUTE OR COMPROMISE FOR GROCERIES

Some residents discussed having a hard time finding quality and affordable grocery options in their neighborhoods.

“I need to commute out to get the right foods. I shop where the White people shop to get produce and meats because the fresh foods in my neighborhood are not fresh, and probably not safe. Didn’t realize I was sacrificing food sources when I moved here. I feel worse eating here. It’s affordable but I need to be careful about what I buy.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

CHALLENGES ACCESSING QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE HEALTHCARE

Many residents reported that the medical care in their neighborhoods was subpar. This is often a key concern for seniors, immigrants, LGBTQ individuals, and residents with disabilities who require culturally sensitive, multi-lingual, or specialized healthcare.

“We need better health care for everyone. The options are terrible. The doctors don’t care. I’m in my first trimester and it’s very difficult to find someone good [in my neighborhood].”

—PARTICIPANT, BANANA KELLY CIA

UNEQUAL AND UNSAFE ENVIRONMENTS

Residents called for more equitable sanitation services and green investments across communities, pointing to uneven quality in public spaces, parks, air quality, and cleanliness between and within neighborhoods. Poor sidewalk conditions and building design disproportionately impact people with disabilities, while asthma rates are often higher in low-income communities of color.

“The environment is not a plus. Too many trucks drive down my block, and my kid was diagnosed with asthma.”

—PARTICIPANT, MAKE THE ROAD

POOR HOUSING QUALITY AS A HEALTH HAZARD

Many residents shared experiences with mold or lead in their apartments, or with aggressive renovation practices in their building that border on harassment. Others discussed how broken appliances, plumbing problems, or pests make their kitchens unusable—forcing them to rely on takeout meals, which have negative health and financial consequences.

“I lived in Washington Heights and they turned the gas off one weekend and said it would take six weeks to fix it. Six weeks lasted ten months. They said they would give us a hot plate but didn’t do that either. We had to pay for cooked food for months which is a huge expense.”

—PARTICIPANT, FIFTH AVENUE COMMITTEE

STRESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY

Residents also discussed the emotional and physical stress associated with challenging housing searches, housing instability, and displacement.

“I went to find an apartment, but they saw my ID and that I was over 70, and they said I was too old. I have cried so many times because I want to stay in America, but nobody wants to rent to me. And my daughter doesn’t have enough space for me.”

—PARTICIPANT, ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY

EQUITY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION THROUGH INCLUSIVE, INTEGRATED SCHOOLING

THE SCHOOL-HOUSING CONNECTION

Many participating residents do not have the opportunity to choose housing based on quality schooling. Instead, many compromise: their children attend non-public schools or travel to another part of the city for school. Some expressed interest in moving closer to better schools, but feel limited due to affordability. Many participants did not even realize that school choice existed, or reported being unable to exercise school choice due to limited transportation in their neighborhood.

“The elementary school was not good quality, but I turned out okay. When I went to high school it felt like I was in jail. It still sticks with me, even though I’m past it. If you wanted access to better high school then you had to travel, but school quality was not even on the radar [for my family].”

—PARTICIPANT, MEKONG NYC

CALLS FOR EQUITABLE SCHOOLS

Many residents called for more equitable educational investments across schools and neighborhoods. Many associate meaningful investments in schools with White, affluent areas and want to see more transparency around school segregation, investment, and educational achievement. Like in housing segregation, parents are often more concerned with equity than integration.

“It’s not a bad thing to be integrated, and it’s not a bad thing to be separated. The bad thing is that when we all pay our fair share and we’re not getting the equal things. If your school has good books and computers, and I’m paying taxes as well, my children should have good books and computers in their class. When things are really equal, people don’t really pay attention to being separated. It gets noticeable when you see that you’re being denied things that other people have.”

—PARTICIPANT, HPD-LED CONVERSATION IN SOUTH BROOKLYN

REDEFINING EXCELLENCE

Some residents shared concerns that the connection between testing and quality education could have a negative impact on how residents and the City define success in public education.

“I lived in Brooklyn in the projects, and then when it came time for high school, I went to Manhattan. But I didn’t like it and I wanted to be back in my own zoned school. I loved that high school, and the people I graduated with are now doing really well. It was considered a ‘bad school’ back then, but being in a bad school doesn’t mean we will be bad people.”

—PARTICIPANT, FLATBUSH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

SCHOOLING AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Participants also called for more holistic, inclusive, and culturally competent schooling that creates a welcoming environment for diverse students and responds to neighborhood context.

“Educators should really research the roots of low student attendance. It might not be about students not being smart, but rather economic issues and housing issues. These can cause mental health issues. So we should develop policies that aren’t just putting a Band-Aid on it.”

—PARTICIPANT, ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY

THE IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS EXIST

The lack of housing choice faced by the majority of participants cannot be untangled from challenges related to poverty and limited economic opportunity. In discussing issues like jobs, benefits, banking, and homeownership, many residents identified clear systemic barriers that limit their economic security and autonomy.

“There are pay gaps in the workforce for women and women of color. When you are getting paid less, [there is] more of a challenge dealing with cost of living.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

Participating New Yorkers called for more meaningful pathways to employment for populations who face barriers in the job market—including people of color, people with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and transgender and gender nonconforming residents.

“There is huge employment discrimination, particularly for transwomen of color. If you’re surviving in a different, underground economy, how do you apply for housing? How about publicly-supported housing? Plus health. You can’t work if you can’t maintain your health, but you have poor healthcare unless you work. These challenges don’t happen in a vacuum.”

—SERVICE PROVIDER, ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

THE NEED FOR BENEFITS REFORM

Residents discussed how increasing access to employment is directly tied to reforming benefits programs, including rental assistance, to ensure they foster opportunity rather than penalize career advancement.

“If we can get people with disabilities working, maybe it will change how they view us, how they rent to us, how they loan to us. The fact is that [people with disabilities] don’t have work, we don’t have the proper training programs to get work, and we’re just too afraid to leave our benefits because we think we’ll miss out on critical Social Security and Medicaid.”

—PARTICIPANT, BROOKLYN CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED

THE NEED FOR FINANCIAL EDUCATION

Participants discussed having limited access to financial services, including fewer banking options in their neighborhood, less information from financial institutions, and less trust in these institutions. Many immigrants and people of color feel that current systems are not designed to support them.

“Many Southeast Asian people don’t save money in the traditional American way. They put their savings in closets or under their bed. This is why banks would rather not take the risk. If you give a loan to a person of color, there is a perception that there is higher risk for [default] due to bad credit or personal history.”

—PARTICIPANT, MEKONG NYC

BANKS STILL DISCRIMINATE

Residents called for more to be done to combat discrimination in financial services and shared disheartening experiences with discrimination in the financial sector because of their race or neighborhood.

“I went to a bank to get a loan, and I was denied. They didn’t say it was because I was Black. They gave me some other dumb reason. Then I heard about Liberty Bank on 125th Street that is owned by Black folks from one of my co-workers. I went there and I told them I had tried two other banks before that. I said to them, ‘Don’t tell me that I can’t buy a house because I’m a woman, and I’m single, and I’m Black. I’m a veteran and a nurse.’ And they gave me the loan. I got the house, but what I had to go through was difficult.”

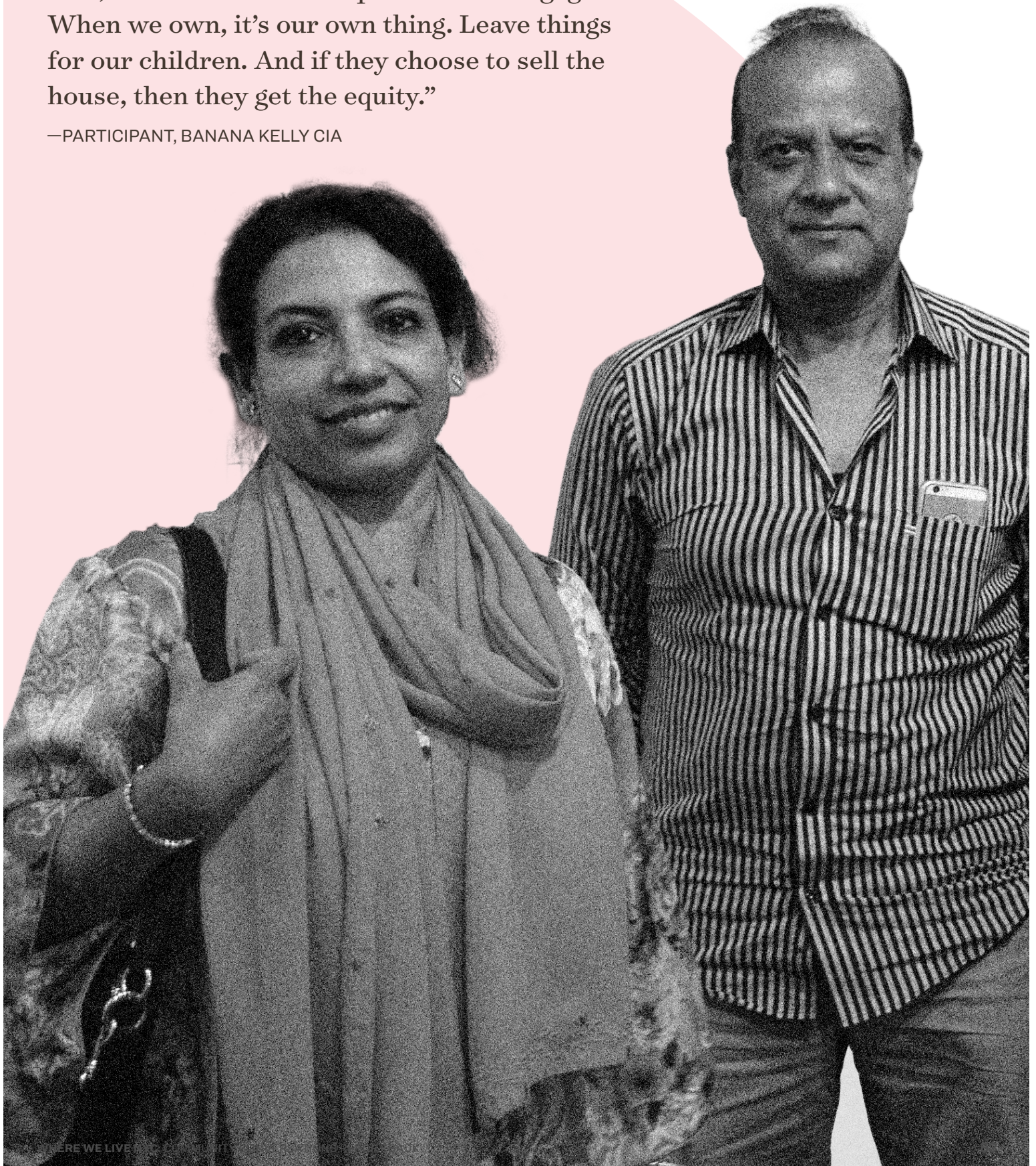
—PARTICIPANT, SAGE ADVOCACY & SERVICES FOR LGBT ELDERLY

THE DREAM OF HOMEOWNERSHIP

Homeownership was a goal universally shared across Community Conversations, but it is a dream that feels very far away for most participants. Many residents called for increased programs for homeownership, especially pathways for longtime neighborhood residents to work toward ownership. There was also desire for opportunities to help homeowners, especially seniors and people with disabilities, stay in their homes.

“I want to own property. I’m spending money on rent, and I would rather spend on a mortgage. When we own, it’s our own thing. Leave things for our children. And if they choose to sell the house, then they get the equity.”

—PARTICIPANT, BANANA KELLY CIA



WHAT WE LEARNED:

defining success

Through the Community Conversations, participating New Yorkers developed a collective vision for what success looks like in their own housing journey, for their family and community, and for the Where We Live NYC process. In dreaming up this future, residents stressed the importance of belonging, community connection, dignity, and self-determination.

A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE IN NEW YORK CITY IS A FUTURE WHERE...

“Everyone can grow
as a collective.”

—PARTICIPANT, CENTER FOR COURT
INNOVATION

“Children can live in
an affordable, diverse
place.”

—PARTICIPANT, FIFTH AVENUE
COMMITTEE

“You feel included.
Where neighbors
know you and you
feel seen.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

“We aren’t just
living together, but
accepting of one
another.”

—PARTICIPANT, CHHAYA CDC



All residents have
“dignity, liberty, and
security.”

—PARTICIPANT, MAKE THE ROAD

“People impacted
by problems... take
the lead to move and
change policy.”

—PARTICIPANT, CHHAYA CDC

All residents “feel
safe and valued.”

—PARTICIPANT, MEKONG NYC

We have “spaces not
just for survival, but
for celebration.”

—PARTICIPANT, ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

All residents “have
the ability to care for
a family, and make
their own choices.”

—PARTICIPANT, NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

All residents “can
flourish with
stability.”

—PARTICIPANT, FIFTH AVENUE
COMMITTEE



what's next

HOW WE WILL USE THIS INPUT

The extensive and thoughtful feedback collected from more than 700 New Yorkers across 62 Community Conversations is directly informing the City's development of fair housing goals and strategies that confront segregation, fight discrimination, and increase opportunity for all.

In addition to the Community Conversations, the City is also conducting data analysis; collaborating with more than 30 government agencies; and collecting input from a Fair Housing Stakeholder Group of more than 150 advocates, service providers, researchers, and community leaders.

The City will release a draft Where We Live NYC report in the summer of 2019 that will include a full overview of what we have learned throughout this effort, along with draft goals and strategies. A final report will be published in the fall of 2019 that will formally launch the implementation phase of this effort, following a detailed policy action plan outlined in the report. As part of Where We Live NYC, HPD will be hosting a series of public events throughout 2019 to ensure New Yorkers can continue to stay engaged and provide input.

acknowledgments

Where We Live NYC is an initiative of the City of New York, led by the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) in partnership with the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) and in close collaboration with numerous additional government and community-based partners.

GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

Administration for Children's Services
City Commission on Human Rights
Department for the Aging
Department of City Planning
Department of Consumer Affairs, Office of Financial Empowerment
Department of Cultural Affairs
Department of Education
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Department of Parks and Recreation
Department of Probation
Department of Sanitation
Department of Small Business Services
Department of Social Services
Department of Transportation
Department of Youth and Community Development
Department of Veteran's Services
Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity
Mayor's Office of Climate Policy and Programs
Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
Mayor's Office of Resiliency
Mayor's Office of Sustainability
Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer
Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence
Mayor's Office of Workforce Development
MTA New York City Transit
New York Police Department
NYC Economic Development Corporation
Office of Management and Budget
School Construction Authority
Taxi and Limousine Commission

COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERS

The City of New York is partnering with a set of community-based organizations to lead Where We Live NYC Community Conversations with residents across the five boroughs. Partners include:

Ali Forney Center
Arab American Association NY
Asian Americans for Equality
Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association
Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled
Center for Court Innovation
Center for Independence of the Disabled NY
Chhaya CDC
Fifth Avenue Committee
Make the Road New York
Neighbors Together
SAGE Advocacy & Services for LGBT Elders
Sapna NYC

A number of additional partners helped to support the community conversations:

Arverne View Tenant Association/L+M Development Partners
The Axis Project
Bronx Power
Flatbush Development Corporation
Guns Down Life Up
HPD's Division of Tenant Resources
Independence Care System
Mekong NYC
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty
MinKwon Center for Community Action
Neighbors Helping Neighbors
New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)
NYC Anti-Violence Project
NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV)
NYC Family Justice Center in Staten Island
The Point Community Development Corporation
Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus
United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg
Voces Latinas

FAIR HOUSING STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The City of New York has brought together advocates, service providers, housing developers, researchers, and community leaders to provide insight and input throughout the Where We Live NYC process.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

To support the design and execution of resident engagement for Where We Live NYC, the City of New York is working closely with a consultant team, including:

HESTER STREET

Urban planning, design, and community development non-profit organization that provides technical and capacity building assistance to community-based organizations, government, and other agencies, ensuring that the people have the tools to shape their own cities

INTERACTION INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Racial justice organization that supports complex organizations, networks, neighborhoods, and movements to create equitable outcomes for communities of color by increasing collaborative leadership

HOUSEOFCAKES

M/WBE multi-disciplinary design studio offering website development, marketing strategy, and complete branding and identity services with a focus on social justice and public policy clients

BUROHAPPOLD

Multidisciplinary engineering and strategy consultancy with a robust track record of developing strategic planning initiatives with the City of New York

ARTS EAST NY

Local arts and storytelling organization committed to presenting, promoting, and preserving multicultural arts to address socio-economic issues that hinder community growth and development



JOIN THE CONVERSATION!

Share your fair housing ideas and experience to help us build a more just future for our city.

Visit nyc.gov/WhereWeLive:



**Host your own
Community
Conversation**
with friends, family,
or neighbors



**Answer questions
online** about
your home and
neighborhood



**Learn more about
the history of
fair housing** and
your rights



Explore data
on diversity and
opportunity in
New York City



**Sign up for our
newsletter** to hear
about upcoming
events and
announcements



You can also share a thought-provoking quote from a Community Conversation or your own fair housing insights using **#WhereWeLiveNYC**.



nyc.gov/WhereWeLive



NYCHousing