

# City of Aspiration

150 Ideas From New Yorkers  
for Building a More Equitable NYC

SEPTEMBER 2022

Center *for an*  
Urban  
Future





# Center *for an* Urban Future

**City of Aspiration** is a publication of the Center for an Urban Future. Researched and written by Tara Bogavelli, Jonathan Bowles, JJ Briscoe, Charlotte Crowe, Eli Dvorkin, Sophia Klein, Melissa Lent, Mikako Murphy, Sabina Unni, and Mac Barrett. Edited by Charlotte Crowe and Jonathan Bowles. Designed by Stislow Design.

**Center for an Urban Future (CUF)** is a leading New York City-based think tank that generates smart and sustainable public policies to reduce inequality, increase economic mobility, and grow the economy.

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## Fisher Brothers Foundation and Winston C. Fisher

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# Introduction

## **A WALK THROUGH NEARLY ANY NEIGHBORHOOD ACROSS THE FIVE BOROUGHS REVEALS A CITY ON**

the rebound. New Yorkers are dining outdoors on dan dan noodles, jerk chicken, and arepas; flocking to museums, theaters, and nightclubs; launching new businesses; and exploring every inch of the city's public parks.

However, amid these welcome signs of recovery, more than two years of turmoil unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated deep inequities. New Yorkers of color remain alarmingly underrepresented in most of the city's well-paying industries, leaving many stuck in low-wage jobs with little opportunity to reach the middle class. Tens of thousands of minority- and immigrant-owned businesses have been hit especially hard since 2020, exacerbating financial vulnerabilities that predated the pandemic. Caregivers have been stretched to their limits and beyond; mental health has emerged as a major public health crisis; and the unequal impact of climate change has grown increasingly severe. The pandemic also exposed longstanding disparities in access to housing, healthcare, education, transportation, and critical infrastructure—from high-speed Internet to parks and open space.

Fortunately, there is widespread consensus among policymakers that bold action is required to make progress toward a more equitable city and lay the foundation for a stronger and broader middle class. However, there is much less agreement over what specific actions should be taken.

This report aims to fill the void. It includes 150 concrete policy ideas for what Mayor Adams, the City Council, and other city leaders can do to create a more equitable city.

To generate fresh and achievable ideas, we turned to 150 exceptional New Yorkers and national policy experts, including community advocates, entrepreneurs, labor leaders, educators, economists, urban planners, artists, designers, public health experts, faith leaders, and more. We asked each of them to contribute a single policy idea that would expand economic opportunity for all, strengthen social infrastructure in communities across the five boroughs, and build a more equitable city.

This report contains ideas both practical and visionary, from providing free online tutoring for low-income students and removing degree requirements for many city government jobs to helping more inventors of color apply for patents, training front-line social workers to become legal advocates, assigning an architect to every community board, and even creating community choirs across the city to spark joy through the power of song. Individually, each of these 150 ideas has the potential to contribute to a more equitable city. Together, they provide a comprehensive blueprint for a renewed city of aspiration, where all New Yorkers can thrive.

As city leaders consider new policies and investments that can make meaningful progress toward a more equitable New York, this report offers concrete ideas in ten key areas: how to close education gaps and help young New Yorkers get ahead; expand opportunities for work-based learning; increase access to good jobs by improving and expanding career training; close the wealth gap by investing in minority and immigrant entrepreneurs, financial literacy, and community hiring; expand childcare and other supports for working New Yorkers; strengthen the city's social safety net; invest in programs that make the most vulnerable New Yorkers healthier; make New York City a more affordable place to live; build greener, cleaner, and more just communities by investing in infrastructure and open space; and foster inclusivity within and through the arts.

The following 30 ideas provide a sampling of the urgency and creativity that runs through this blueprint for building and sustaining a more equitable city for years to come.

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**Follow the state of Maryland's lead and remove degree requirements from thousands of city government jobs**

Lannia Small, Director of Global Strategy and Partnerships, Social Impact, Indeed

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**Create an economic mobility outcomes fund**

Andi Phillips, Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Maycomb Capital

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**Close pandemic learning gaps by investing in coaching for NYC's public school teachers**

Sarah Johnson, CEO, Teaching Lab

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**Create community choirs across NYC**

Schele Williams, Broadway Director; Founding Member, Black Theatre United

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**Add a planner and an architect to every NYC Community Board to help them become more forceful advocates for New York's neighborhoods**

Rosalie Genevro, Executive Director, Architectural League of New York

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**Provide doula support to all New Yorkers giving birth in public hospitals and partner with CUNY to train this workforce**

Toya Williford, Executive Director, AC & JC Foundation; former Executive Director, Mayor's Fund to Advance NYC

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**Provide free online tutoring for all low-income students**

Aly Murray, Founder and Executive Director, UPchieve

---

**Launch a Golden Ticket for foster youth to guarantee transportation to school and supportive services**

Ronald E. Richter, CEO, JCCA

---

**Provide Internet-enabled laptops to New Yorkers enrolled in workforce development programs**

Danae McLeod, Executive Director, Grace Institute and Outreach

---

**Help more NYC creators of color patent their brilliance as a way of closing racial wealth gaps**

Joseph Scantlebury, President and CEO, Living Cities

---

**Rezone low-rise commercial corridors in middle-income neighborhoods to spur more affordable housing and greater diversity**

Marc Jahr, Senior Advisor, Forsyth Street Advisors; former President, NYC Housing Development Corporation

---

**Challenge NYC's largest employers to develop new pathway programs that would open doors for New Yorkers of color**

Kristen Titus, former Chief Technology and Innovation Officer, New York State

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**Expand mobile health units to bring access to primary care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers**

Melanie Hartzog, President and CEO, The New York Foundling; former NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services

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**Hire local environmental stewards to keep low-income neighborhoods free of trash and pollution**

Janet Rodriguez, Founder and CEO, SoHarlem

---

**Tap the purchasing and hiring power of hospitals, universities, and other anchor institutions**

Linda Gibbs, Principal for Social Services, Bloomberg Associates; former NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services

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**Transform underutilized commercial real estate into studios for young, diverse creatives**

Alain Sylvain, Founder and CEO, SYLVAIN

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**Remove barriers that prevent undocumented teens from participating in the Summer Youth Employment Program**

Brian Cohen, Executive Director, Beam Center

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**Invest in climate-related workforce development programs in environmental justice communities—funded with a stormwater fee**

Maggie Greenfield, Executive Director, Bronx River Alliance

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**Retrain New Yorkers for better jobs by providing scholarships for short-term career training programs at CUNY**

Kenneth Adams, President, LaGuardia Community College

---

**Provide universal basic income to young people aging out of the foster care system**

Saroya Friedman-Gonzalez, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Children

---

**Help employers diversify their talent pipeline**

Winston Fisher, Partner, Fisher Brothers; Co-Chair, NYC Regional Economic Development Council

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**Build the infrastructure needed to launch 10,000 new youth apprenticeships by 2026**

Barbara Chang, Executive Director, CareerWise New York

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**Use bus network redesigns to reduce NYC’s racial access gap**

Tabitha Decker, Deputy Executive Director, TransitCenter

---

**Train and support 100,000 older adults in launching second careers and entrepreneurial ventures**

Angie Kamath, Dean, NYU School of Professional Studies

---

**Train social workers and other frontline staff to become “justice advocates,” providing free legal advice to low-income New Yorkers**

Rohan Pavuluri, CEO, Upsolve

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**Boost support for NYC’s Family Child Care providers**

Jaime-Jin Lewis, Founder and CEO, Wiggle Room

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**Create an NYC Health Service Corps that embeds trusted community health workers within healthcare institutions**

Tom Frieden, President and CEO, Resolve to Save Lives; former Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; former Commissioner, NYC Health Department

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**Invest \$10 million in the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to grow the capacity of POC-led nonprofits**

Frankie Miranda, President and CEO, Hispanic Federation

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**Enact comprehensive zoning reform to build the housing that can make NYC significantly more affordable**

Jason Furman, Aetna Professor of the Practice of Economic Policy, Harvard University; former Chairman, Council of Economic Advisers

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**Launch a pilot program to transfer a NYCHA development into a Community Land Trust to be owned in perpetuity by the tenants**

Melissa Mark-Viverito, former Speaker, New York City Council

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## I. Close education gaps and empower young New Yorkers to get ahead

1. **Close pandemic learning gaps by investing in coaching for NYC's public school teachers**  
Sarah Johnson, CEO, Teaching Lab
2. **Provide free online tutoring for all low-income students**  
Aly Murray, Founder and Executive Director, UPchieve
3. **Launch a Golden Ticket for foster youth to guarantee transportation to school and supportive services**  
Ronald E. Richter, CEO, JCCA
4. **Prevent college students from dropping out by requiring CUNY to share financial aid information and track accessibility**  
Margo Wright, Founder, Yenko
5. **Create a virtual archive of educational classes**  
David Nocenti, former Executive Director, Union Settlement
6. **Expand CS4All to teach every K-12 public school student computer science every year**  
Diane Levitt, Senior Director of K-12 Education, Cornell Tech
7. **Launch a major effort to recruit, train, and retain the next generation of public school educators**  
Herminia Palacio, President and CEO, Guttmacher Institute; former NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
8. **Upskill school workers into coaches to get kids moving again through sports**  
Udai Tambar, CEO and President, New York Junior Tennis & Learning
9. **Integrate early childhood education by helping providers blend government funding and private tuition**  
Alan van Capelle, President and CEO, Educational Alliance
10. **Create new programs, informed by data, to support Covid orphans**  
Eric Brettschneider, Senior Fellow, Institute for State and Local Governance, CUNY; former First Deputy Commissioner, NYC Administration for Children Services
11. **Assemble a youth council to advise the mayor's office**  
Alicia Guevara, CEO, Big Brothers Big Sisters NYC
12. **Create a major new push to support disconnected youth**  
John Mollenkopf, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center; Director, Center for Urban Research
13. **Equip NYC's public education system to meet students' cultural needs**  
Betsy Cohen, Executive Director, Youth Communication
14. **Invest 10 percent of city workforce dollars in training for parents**  
Anthony Tassi, CEO, Literacy Partners
15. **Integrate youth voices into city policymaking**  
The Youth Steering Committee of the NYC Youth Agenda representing Citizens Committee for Children, CUNY's Intergenerational Change Initiative, the YVote, and Next Generation Politics

## II. Expand opportunities for work-based learning

- 16. Build the infrastructure needed to launch 10,000 new youth apprenticeships by 2026**  
Barbara Chang, Executive Director, CareerWise New York
- 17. Require work-based learning opportunities for all high school students and connect them to CUNY**  
Claudia Schrader, President, Kingsborough Community College
- 18. Level the playing field for public school students by creating more paid internships that offer academic credit for their experience**  
Jason Duchin, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, DreamYard Project
- 19. Create a 1,000-student, CUNY-wide paid internship program in partnership with the private sector**  
Madhuri Kommareddi, former Director of Workforce Development, New York State
- 20. Remove barriers that prevent undocumented teens from participating in the Summer Youth Employment Program**  
Brian Cohen, Executive Director, Beam Center
- 21. Develop and expand K-12 programs to prepare young New Yorkers for careers in the legal profession and other industries**  
B. Seth Bryant, Managing Partner, Bryant Rabbino LLP
- 22. Provide paid internship opportunities for undocumented youth**  
Vanessa Luna, Co-Founder and Chief Program Officer, ImmSchools
- 23. Create private sector internships for transition-age youth**  
Keith Little, President and CEO, SCO Family of Services
- 24. Launch a city-wide program for internships at nonprofit organizations**  
Marvin Krislov, President, Pace University

## III. Increase access to good jobs by improving and expanding career training

- 25. Help employers diversify their talent pipeline**  
Winston Fisher, Partner, Fisher Brothers; Co-Chair, NYC Regional Economic Development Council
- 26. Create an economic mobility outcomes fund**  
Andi Phillips, Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Maycomb Capital
- 27. Challenge NYC's largest employers to develop new pathway programs that would open doors for New Yorkers of color**  
Kristen Titus, former Chief Technology and Innovation Officer, New York State
- 28. Provide Internet-enabled laptops to New Yorkers enrolled in workforce development programs**  
Danae McLeod, Executive Director, Grace Institute and Outreach
- 29. Make community colleges the centerpiece of a citywide strategy to help reskill New Yorkers for a changing economy**  
Larry D. Johnson, President, Guttman Community College
- 30. Train and support 100,000 older adults in launching second careers and entrepreneurial ventures**  
Angie Kamath, Dean, NYU School of Professional Studies
- 31. Scale up economic mobility programs that have already demonstrated results for clients and communities**  
Doug Bauer, Executive Director, The Clark Foundation
- 32. Expand workforce training stipends to help more low-income New Yorkers participate in high-quality career training programs**  
Virginia Knox, President, MDRC
- 33. Follow the state of Maryland's lead and remove degree requirements from thousands of city government jobs**  
Lannia Small, Director of Global Strategy and Partnerships, Social Impact, Indeed



- 34. Retrain New Yorkers for better jobs by providing scholarships for short-term career training programs at CUNY**  
Kenneth Adams, President, LaGuardia Community College
- 35. Leverage NYC’s research universities to spark well-paying jobs in emerging industries and create a more broad-based economy**  
Andrew Hamilton, President, NYU
- 36. Create a workforce development surcharge on large employers**  
Darren Bloch, CEO and Executive Director, Greenwich House
- 37. Provide public matching funds for highly effective job training programs**  
Scott Thomas, Co-Founder, Arbor Rising
- 38. Remove employment barriers for immigrant professionals**  
Kyung Yoon, President, Korean American Community Foundation
- 39. Strengthen the workforce development pipeline for New Yorkers with disabilities**  
Diosdado Gica, President of Programs and Operations, ICD-Institute for Career Development
- 40. Make digital literacy a fundamental part of every CUNY education by launching a universal introductory computer science course**  
Ann Kirschner, Entrepreneur; former University Professor, CUNY Graduate Center
- 41. Bring film and TV jobs into the city's Workforce1 Career Center system and institute community hiring goals for film and TV productions**  
Rafael Espinal, Executive Director, Freelancers Union; former NYC Council Member
- 42. Partner with CUNY to create a one-stop-shop clearinghouse matching employers and students for internships, fellowships, and jobs**  
Rhonda Binda, Associate Adjunct Professor, Medgar Evers and Queens Colleges
- 43. Launch 1,000 apprenticeships for diverse and low-income New Yorkers to gain access to tech careers**  
Dan Teran, Managing Partner, Gutter Capital
- 44. Partner with tech companies to provide free STEM skills education for students, educators, and jobseekers**  
Justina Nixon-Saintil, Vice President, ESG and Corporate Social Responsibility, IBM
- 45. Empower the chief of student pathways and remove college degree requirements from government jobs**  
Reuben Ogbonna, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Marcy Lab School
- 46. Build innovation hubs in low-income neighborhoods to help young people launch tech careers**  
Jessica Santana, Co-Founder and CEO, America on Tech
- 47. Remove degree requirements for many government jobs, setting an example for inclusive hiring throughout the economy**  
Kate Naranjo, former Director of the STARs Policy Project, Opportunity@Work
- 48. Incentivize employers to remove degree requirements from job descriptions**  
Jennifer Stredler, Vice President, Workforce Development, Salesforce
- 49. Fund place-based workforce collaboratives**  
Ashley Putnam, Director, Economic Growth and Mobility Project, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia
- 50. Prohibit inquiries about age and date of birth in job applications**  
Kevin Jones, Associate State Director, Advocacy, AARP New York
- 51. Invest in soft skill training for underemployed and unemployed New Yorkers**  
Orit Lender, CEO, JCC of Staten Island

## IV. Close the wealth gap by investing in minority and immigrant entrepreneurs, financial literacy, and community hiring

- 52. Help more NYC creators of color patent their brilliance as a way of closing racial wealth gaps**  
Joseph Scantlebury, President and CEO, Living Cities
- 53. Help minority entrepreneurs win more city contracts by collateralizing loans for CDFIs through contract assignments**  
Connie Evans, President and CEO, Association for Enterprise Opportunity
- 54. Tap the purchasing and hiring power of hospitals, universities, and other anchor institutions**  
Linda Gibbs, Principal for Social Services, Bloomberg Associates; former NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
- 55. Hire MWBE climate tech startups to meet NYC's ambitious green infrastructure goals**  
Sonam Velani, Founder and CEO, Streetlife Ventures
- 56. Use the forthcoming boom in infrastructure spending to create a cohesive small business support system**  
Xavier de Souza Briggs, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution
- 57. Use NYC government procurement to advance the economic interests of low income communities**  
Stanley Brezenoff, former NYC Deputy Mayor; former President & CEO, NYC Health+Hospitals
- 58. Use alternative criteria for business funding other than zip codes and census tracts**  
Victoria Lee, Co-Founder and CEO, Welcome to Chinatown
- 59. Expand NYC's Department of Consumer and Worker Protection to give higher-quality financial services to more New Yorkers**  
Lisa Servon, Kevin and Erica Penn Presidential Professor of City and Regional Planning, UPenn Weitzman School of Design
- 60. Leverage entrepreneurship education to disrupt the cycle of poverty in public housing communities**  
J.D. LaRock, President and CEO, Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship
- 61. Create and scale up entrepreneurship programs for Hispanic women**  
Myriam Rebling, Executive Director, Qualitas of Life Foundation
- 62. Make it easier for MWBEs to become certified and win city contracts**  
Jill Johnson, Co-Founder and CEO, Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership
- 63. Provide startup funds and technical assistance to cooperatives for undocumented domestic violence survivors**  
Nathaly Rubio-Torio, Executive Director, Voces Latinas
- 64. Help home-based entrepreneurs become small business owners**  
Kevin Alexander, President and CEO, Rockaway Development Corporation
- 65. Teach every high school student financial literacy skills**  
Chymeka Olfonse, former Regional Executive Director, BUILD NYC
- 66. Ensure that small businesses receive documentation on fines and regulations in multiple languages**  
Jo-Ann Yoo, Executive Director, Asian American Federation
- 67. Help more New Yorkers invest in the digital economy**  
Ramik Williams, Co-Executive Director, Kings Against Violence Initiative
- 68. Provide free financial and legal counsel to property owners in low-status communities**  
Majora Carter, MacArthur Fellow; Urban Revitalization Strategist; Real Estate Developer; Author of *Reclaiming Your Community: You Don't Have To Move Out Of Your Community To Live In A Better One*
- 69. Accelerate the use of technology to build a more equitable city and prepare all New Yorkers to use it**  
Michael Blake, CEO, Atlas Strategy Group; former NYS Assembly Member

## V. Expand child care and other supports for working New Yorkers

- 70. Boost support for Family Child Care providers**  
Jaime-Jin Lewis, Founder and CEO, Wiggle Room
- 71. Enact new protections related to employees' working time**  
Janet Gornick, Director, Stone Center of Socio-Economic Inequality; Professor of Political Science and Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center
- 72. Implement supportive workplace policies for all women at every stage of life**  
Anu Duggal, Founding Partner, Female Founders Fund
- 73. Partner with CBOs to provide free childcare to undocumented mothers**  
Yesenia Mata, Executive Director, La Colmena
- 74. Lobby state leaders to increase NYC's minimum wage so that it is truly a living wage**  
David Garza, President and CEO, Henry Street Settlement
- 75. Enable more New Yorkers to access well-paying healthcare jobs by providing free childcare for those in job training programs**  
Maria Castaneda, Senior Executive Vice President, 1199SEIU
- 76. Establish new financial relief for single mothers that don't qualify for existing public programs**  
Garnesha Ezediario, Greenwood Initiative Lead, Bloomberg Philanthropies

## VI. Strengthen NYC's social safety net

- 77. Supplement the Empire State Tax Credit so that the poorest and youngest children benefit the most**  
Irwin Garfinkel, Mitchell I. Ginsberg Professor of Contemporary Urban Problems; Co-Founding Director, Columbia Population Research Center, Columbia School of Social Work
- 78. Provide universal basic income to young people aging out of the foster care system**  
Saroya Friedman-Gonzalez, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Children
- 79. Narrow the racial wealth gap with baby bonds**  
Gary Cunningham, President and CEO, Prosperity Now
- 80. Institute a minimum basic income for NYC residents earning below 250 percent of the federal poverty level**  
Dia Bryant, Executive Director, Education Trust–New York
- 81. Remove barriers to employment for people on public benefits with at least six months of earned income disregard**  
Katy Gaul-Stigge, President and CEO, Goodwill Industries of Greater New York and Northern New Jersey
- 82. Enable more New Yorkers to access food benefits by expanding eligibility and centering user needs**  
Bill Cromie, CEO, HelpKitchen
- 83. Scale up the Service Design Studio and hire service designers across city agencies**  
Noel Hidalgo, Executive Director, BetaNYC
- 84. Collect feedback from residents before rolling out new city services**  
Simon Sylvester-Chaudhuri, Founder and Executive Director, CIV:LAB
- 85. Train social workers and other frontline staff to become "justice advocates," providing free legal advice to low-income New Yorkers**  
Rohan Pavuluri, CEO, Upsolve
- 86. Build data bridges so that government agencies and human services organizations can more efficiently share data**  
Ben Thomases, Executive Director, Queens Community House
- 87. Streamline NYC's background check process for prospective employees**  
Geoff Canada, President and Founder, Harlem Children's Zone; Jennifer Jones Austin, CEO and Executive Director, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

- 88. **Invest \$10 million in the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to grow the capacity of POC-led nonprofits**  
Frankie Miranda, President and CEO, Hispanic Federation
- 89. **Provide tech support via 311 to help the many older New Yorkers who struggle to navigate the Internet, access telemedicine, and apply for benefits online**  
Christian González-Rivera, Director of Strategic Policy Initiatives, Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging
- 90. **Ensure pay equity and create growth opportunities for nonprofit workers of color**  
Darlene Williams, President and CEO, Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow
- 91. **Boost NYC’s smallest, most vulnerable nonprofits by making it easier for them to access common, multi-year grant applications**  
Matt Miszewski, CEO, Catchafire
- 92. **Enact a COLA for human services workers and make it recurring**  
Judy Zangwill, Executive Director, Sunnyside Community Services
- 93. **Raise wages for municipal employees and workers at nonprofits that contract with the city**  
Ana Oliveira, President and CEO, The New York Women’s Foundation
- 94. **Establish a minimum wage of \$22 an hour for social service workers**  
Davon Russell, President, WHEDco
- 95. **Cover the indirect costs of human services in perpetuity and ensure nonprofits are reimbursed on time**  
Janelle Farris, President and Executive Director, Brooklyn Community Services
- 96. **Fund a 24/7 arrest support hotline to guarantee Early Legal Representation for arrested New Yorkers**  
Jelani Anglin, Co-Founder and CEO, Good Call NYC
- 97. **Forge more nimble partnerships between city agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic foundations**  
Laura Jean Watters, Executive Director, The Staten Island Foundation

## VII. Invest in programs that make the most vulnerable New Yorkers healthier

- 98. **Expand mobile health units to bring access to primary care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers**  
Melanie Hartzog, President and CEO, The New York Foundling; former NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
- 99. **Provide doula support to all New Yorkers giving birth in public hospitals and partner with CUNY to train this workforce**  
Toya Williford, Executive Director, AC & JC Foundation; former Executive Director, Mayor’s Fund to Advance NYC
- 100. **Create an NYC Health Service Corps that embeds trusted community health workers within healthcare institutions**  
Tom Frieden, President and CEO, Resolve to Save Lives; former Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; former Commissioner, NYC Health Department
- 101. **Fund community health improvement plans for the ten NYC neighborhoods facing the steepest inequities**  
Sharon Greenberger, President and CEO, YMCA of Greater New York
- 102. **Provide basic home repairs to improve health outcomes**  
Kassa Belay, Executive Director, The Brownsville Partnership
- 103. **Remove law enforcement from mental health crisis response**  
Cal Hedigan, CEO, Community Access
- 104. **Invest in worker- and community-led innovation to improve indoor air quality for frontline workers and low-income residents**  
Michael Partis, Executive Director, Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative



## VIII. Make NYC a more affordable place to live

- 105. Provide comprehensive housing support for youth exiting foster care, including dedicated housing specialists at CBOs**  
Michelle Yanche, Executive Director, Good Shepherd Services
- 106. Reform land use laws to make it easier to convert commercial buildings into affordable housing**  
Ingrid Gould Ellen, Faculty Director, Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy; Paulette Goddard Professor of Urban Policy and Planning, NYU
- 107. Rezone low-rise commercial corridors in middle-income neighborhoods to spur more affordable housing and greater diversity**  
Marc Jahr, Senior Advisor, Forsyth Street Advisors; former President, NYC Housing Development Corporation
- 108. Approach housing as a human right and provide housing vouchers for all who qualify**  
Beatriz de la Torre, Managing Director of Housing and Homelessness, Trinity Church Wall Street
- 109. Launch a pilot program to transfer a NYCHA development into a Community Land Trust to be owned in perpetuity by the tenants**  
Melissa Mark-Viverito, former Speaker, New York City Council
- 110. Update underutilized housing programs to preserve and maintain more affordable housing**  
Rafael E. Cestero, CEO, The Community Preservation Corporation
- 111. Enact comprehensive zoning reform to build the housing that can make NYC significantly more affordable**  
Jason Furman, Aetna Professor of the Practice of Economic Policy, Harvard University; former Chairman, President Barack Obama's Council of Economic Advisers
- 112. Build 600,000 units of housing to meet the needs of New Yorkers today and change the rules to allow for a wider range of housing types in the future**  
Eric S. Lee, Founder and Chair, Bennett Midland
- 113. Legalize Single Room Occupancy housing to provide affordable housing**  
Muzzy Rosenblatt, CEO and President, Bowery Residents Committee
- 114. Help faith-based institutions with pre-development funding to convert underused real estate or sell air rights, enabling more affordable housing and community spaces**  
Joyce Moy, Executive Director, Asian American/Asian Research Institute, CUNY
- 115. Invest \$4 billion to build affordable housing for NYC's older adults**  
Allison Nickerson, Executive Director, LiveOn NY
- 116. Develop new programs that help homeowners of color retain their homes**  
Valerie White, Senior Executive Director, LISC New York
- 117. Empower NYCHA residents to lead the reinvestment and rehabilitation of NYC's public housing**  
David Jones, President and CEO, Community Service Society of New York
- 118. End family homelessness by prioritizing preventative services, supporting the well-being of current shelter residents, and easing the transition into permanent housing**  
Jennifer March, Executive Director, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York; Co-Convener, Family Homelessness Coalition
- 119. Disrupt the NYC housing market to create more affordable housing**  
Nicole Branca, Executive Director, New Destiny Housing
- 120. Prioritize homeownership as part of NYC's affordable housing strategy**  
Jeremy Kohomban, President and CEO, The Children's Village

## IX. Make NYC's communities greener, cleaner, and more just by investing in infrastructure and open space

- 121. Hire local environmental stewards to keep low-income neighborhoods free of trash and pollution**  
Janet Rodriguez, Founder and CEO, SoHarlem
- 122. Invest in climate-related workforce development programs in environmental justice communities—funded with a stormwater fee**  
Maggie Greenfield, Executive Director, Bronx River Alliance
- 123. Add a planner and an architect to every NYC Community Board to help them become more forceful advocates for New York's neighborhoods**  
Rosalie Genevro, Executive Director, Architectural League of New York
- 124. Work across city agencies to create public spaces that are accessible, inclusive, and just**  
Setha Low, Distinguished Professor of Environmental Psychology, Geography, Anthropology, and Women's Studies; Director, Public Space Research Group, CUNY Graduate Center
- 125. Use bus network redesigns to reduce NYC's racial access gap**  
Tabitha Decker, Deputy Executive Director, TransitCenter
- 126. Strengthen NYC's social infrastructure by reforming the capital construction process**  
Julie Sandorf, President, Charles H. Revson Foundation
- 127. Build a circular New York City by supporting local reuse and repair businesses and organizations**  
Sandra Goldmark, Associate Professor of Professional Practice in Theatre; Director of Campus Sustainability and Climate Action, Barnard College
- 128. Invest in ports and industrial zones to create a cleaner economy and more prosperous city**  
Bruce Katz, Founding Director, Nowak Metro Finance Lab, Drexel University
- 129. Expand transit options by making OMNY the universal "mobility token" for all modes in NYC**  
Jessie Lazarus, Vice President Go-to-Market, CARMERA; former NYC Chief Digital Officer
- 130. Give ownership of our digital future to the people**  
Derrick Lewis, Co-Founder and Chair, The Bronx Community Foundation
- 131. Transform how NYC collects and uses data to improve communities**  
David Belt, Co-Founder, New Lab
- 132. Help individuals and small businesses take part in the renewable energy boom**  
Celeste Frye, Co-Founder and CEO, Public Works Partners LLC
- 133. Enforce access to privately owned public spaces**  
Thomas Balsley, Principal Designer, SWA/Balsley
- 134. Revitalize low-income neighborhoods and make cycling more accessible by transforming abandoned infrastructure into a network of biking tubes**  
Laurie Garrett, Pulitzer-Prize Winning Journalist; Columnist, Foreign Policy; Author of *The Coming Plague* and *I Heard the Sirens Scream*
- 135. Tie special permits for last-mile delivery companies to quality industrial job creation**  
Laura Wolf-Powers, Associate Professor of Urban Policy and Planning, Hunter College
- 136. Reenvision public markets as a type of civic infrastructure that delivers local, healthy food to New Yorkers**  
Robert LaValva, Placemaking Consultant, Greensward Advisors; Founder, New Amsterdam Market
- 137. Reactivate unoccupied spaces in the city's business districts as a rotating gallery of community-based ideas and solutions**  
Laura Sparks, President, The Cooper Union
- 138. Create an expedited path for as-of-right changes of use to transform underutilized office and retail spaces**  
Miriam Peterson, Co-Founder and Principal, Peterson Rich Office

**139. Pilot a Participatory Justice program in low-income neighborhoods, empowering residents to set the direction for ensuring their safety**

Jeremy Travis, Executive Vice President of Criminal Justice, Arnold Ventures; former President, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

**140. Redesign zoning categories to meet the city's current needs and expand opportunities for equity**

Leah Meisterlin, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University

**141. Revamp NYC's subway system**

Will Raderman, Employment Policy Analyst, Niskanen Center

**142. Enact new zoning regulations to revitalize unused office space**

Eran Chen, Founding Principal and Executive Director, ODA

**143. Launch an SMS alert system to promote civic engagement**

Carole Wacey, former President and CEO; Lea Giddins, Senior Program and Policy Manager, Women Creating Change

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## X. Foster inclusivity within and through the arts

**144. Create community choirs across NYC**

Schele Williams, Broadway Director; Founding Member, Black Theatre United

**145. Develop a paid internship program in music, media, and entertainment to help expand access to creative careers**

Jeanne Houck, Executive Director, Creative Arts Team, CUNY

**146. Transform underutilized commercial real estate into studios for young, diverse creatives**

Alain Sylvain, Founder and CEO, SYLVAIN

**147. Launch a Creativity Fund to support projects that advance equity in the creative economy, overseen by a chief creativity officer**

Sharese Bullock-Bailey, Festival Director and Chief Innovation Officer, Urbanworld Foundation, Inc.

**148. Reimagine and relaunch the Spaceworks model to unlock affordable space for the arts**

David Ehrenberg, former President and CEO, Brooklyn Navy Yard

**149. Help more young adults prepare for creative careers by expanding the model of creative agency apprenticeships**

Quardean Lewis-Allen, Executive Director, Youth Design Center

**150. Direct 1 percent of the city's annual budget to culture and prioritize investments that build cultural equity**

Sade Lythcott, CEO, National Black Theatre

**151. Develop a searchable online database of music education programs for underserved families**

Anne Fitzgibbon, Founder and Executive Director, Harmony Program

**152. Provide guaranteed income for NYC's artists**

Charlotte Cohen, former Executive Director, Brooklyn Arts Council

The ideas contained in this publication were shared in interviews, email correspondence, and roundtable meetings from March to June 2022. The Center for an Urban Future reached out to 250 potential contributors across all five boroughs and received ideas from 150 individuals. CUF asked each person for a single idea to build a more equitable city, expand economic opportunity for all New Yorkers, and/or strengthen social infrastructure in communities across the five boroughs. Each idea is solely attributable to the individual contributor and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of any affiliated organization or of the Center for an Urban Future. Ideas have been revised and edited for clarity and concision. Contributors were not asked to endorse the full slate of ideas collected in this report nor are they responsible for any errors or omissions contained in the final publication.

# 1

Close education gaps and **empower young New Yorkers** to get ahead



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## 1. **Close pandemic learning gaps by investing in coaching for NYC’s public school teachers**

Sarah Johnson, CEO, Teaching Lab

The pandemic deepened already alarming educational opportunity gaps across New York. One of the best ways to close these high-stakes learning disparities is by investing in coaching for teachers. Time and again, it’s been shown that the single most important in-school factor for improving student learning is effective teachers. While many teachers are already excellent at their craft, today’s teachers are being asked to do so much—from learning new instructional practice to counseling students dealing with trauma from the pandemic—and could benefit from coaching. Research has shown that coaching teachers has a transformative impact on student performance. It can also have a far-reaching impact: coaching one elementary school teacher has the potential to make a positive difference for as many as 30 students, while coaching a high school teacher could impact 150 students. Unfortunately, New York has long underinvested in coaching. And in the past two years, several of the coaches employed by the Department of Education (DOE) were redeployed to other duties, including filling teacher vacancies. The mayor and City Council should make a major new investment in coaching for public school teachers, bringing on new coaches and ending the recent practice of reassigning experienced coaches. The DOE should actively recruit new coaches who specialize in the subject areas and grade levels with the greatest needs, such as early literacy and middle school math. Coaches could initially target teachers in the districts hardest hit by the pandemic, with the potential to eventually reach the city’s 75,000 teachers.

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## 2. **Provide free online tutoring for all low-income students**

Aly Murray, Founder and Executive Director, UPchieve

Research shows that one-on-one and small group tutoring has a profoundly positive impact on learning outcomes for students. Access to tutoring can make the difference between a student feeling confident or anxious about school, staying on grade level or falling behind, and even graduating with a high school diploma or dropping out altogether. Unfortunately, at an average of \$35 an hour for an online tutor, paid tutoring services are too expensive for many low-income families to afford, and most after-school tutoring programs are difficult for students to access due to their fixed times and locations. To help maximize low-income students’ chances of success, the city should ensure all low-income students whose families qualify for SNAP have 24/7 access to free online tutoring. By partnering with online tutoring nonprofits, the city could provide access to tutoring support for all grade levels, subjects, and times. This free tutoring program should be publicized with a citywide marketing campaign via subways, libraries, schools, and community centers, much like the current free Pre-K program for families in New York City, so that all low-income students and their caregivers know that academic support is available if and when they need it.

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## 3. **Launch a Golden Ticket for foster youth to guarantee transportation to school and supportive services**

Ronald E. Richter, CEO, JCCA

New York City children in foster care have a four-year high school graduation rate of just 8 percent. Investing in better long-term outcomes for New Yorkers in foster care is essential for creating a more equitable city—and boosting high school graduation rates is a crucial place to start. But while foster youth face a number of

challenges making it through high school, simply getting to their schools in the first place remains an enormous barrier. As a result, attendance is alarmingly low and too many foster youth end up missing days and weeks of classes, derailing them from the path to an on-time graduation. To change this, Mayor Adams and the City Council should launch a Golden Ticket for foster youth that guarantees transportation to school. Both an effective tool to ensure daily transportation needs are met and a powerful symbol that the city cares about their futures, a Golden Ticket should be given to every young person entering foster care, to be redeemed for rides to and from school via any mode of transportation—including public transit, Citibike, and ride-hailing services. Using this Golden Ticket to solve transportation needs should be just the start. The city can go a step further by ensuring that young people in care can use their Golden Ticket to access the best that the DOE has to offer—whether that's guaranteed access to after school programs, Summer Youth Employment opportunities, mental health services, individualized education programs, when appropriate, or career exploration. By doing so, New York City can create a more level playing field where education will never be interrupted or unequal for foster children.

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#### **4. Prevent students from dropping out by requiring CUNY to share financial aid information and track accessibility**

Margo Wright, Founder, Yenka

More than any other university in the country, the City University of New York (CUNY) is a springboard to the middle class for students from low-income, historically marginalized backgrounds. But every year, an alarming number of CUNY students are forced to drop out because they exhaust or otherwise become ineligible for financial aid. Eligibility requirements for federal (PELL) and state (TAP) financial aid are so far buried in fine print that students are often completely unaware of the catastrophic consequences a minor decision, such as dropping a class, could have on their financial, academic, and professional lives. To address this lack of transparency, all CUNY colleges should start providing clear, practical, and personalized financial aid information to students every semester, so that they have the information they need to choose the necessary courses and earn the necessary grades to maintain their aid until graduation. The city should also require CUNY to gather data and report on financial aid eligibility and access, just as it reports on retention and graduation rates. With so much funding dedicated to the public university system, these institutions should be held accountable for ensuring hundreds of thousands of low-income students are taking full advantage of financial aid.

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#### **5. Create a virtual archive of educational classes**

David Nocenti, former Executive Director, Union Settlement

New York City continues to face a shortage of excellent teachers, particularly in low-income communities of color. While a student in Brooklyn Heights may have access to an Advanced Placement U.S. History course with an engaging teacher, the same course, of the same quality, may not be available to a student in East Harlem. To improve access to high-quality education in low-income neighborhoods, New York City should create an archive of free virtual courses accessible to anyone, anytime. During the pandemic, many teachers learned how to effectively record their classes, and the DOE, CUNY, and the city's public library systems could make a wide variety of recorded courses publicly available. Such an archive could serve students whose families can't afford a math tutor or SAT prep course, aspiring professionals looking to take Business English after they put their children to bed, or college students whose desired courses may not be offered every semester. Online content will never be a complete substitute for in-person classroom engagement, but it can act as a meaningful supplement. As the city seeks to close learning gaps and boost educational equity, it should use every tool at its disposal.

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## 6. **Expand CS4All to teach every K-12 public school student computer science every year**

Diane Levitt, Senior Director of K-12 Education, Cornell Tech

Many of the good jobs being created in New York are in the tech sector or require STEM skills. To help more New Yorkers access these careers, the city should ensure students receive high-quality computer science instruction throughout their K-12 years. In 2015, the de Blasio administration took an important step when it launched Computer Science for All (CS4All) to provide computer science classes to every student at every public school. The program, which has so far been rolled out to 825 schools, may be the single most important way for New York to address the troubling underrepresentation of girls and New Yorkers of color in tech. The current mandate requires each student to receive a meaningful unit of computer science at four points: twice in elementary school and once each in middle and high school. The city should mandate instruction at every grade level for every student. In addition to fully funding CS4All to train current teachers, the city should leverage CUNY to provide computer science education courses for pre-service teachers, introduce a computer science specialist in every public school, and continue efforts to ensure the curriculum is culturally relevant. Of New York City's 1.1 million public-school students, 65 percent are Black or Latinx, groups historically excluded from tech. Increasing access to tech education can dramatically narrow divides in economic opportunity.

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## 7. **Launch a major effort to recruit, train, and retain the next generation of public school educators**

Herminia Palacio, President and CEO, Guttmacher Institute;  
former NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services

COVID deepened health and social inequities in New York City and across the country. One of the most powerful tools leaders have at their disposal to close these gaps is public education. In order to strengthen the city's public school system, leaders should take bold action to recruit, train, credential, deploy, and retain the city's next generation of public school educators, with a focus on teaching students how to build a resilient, sustainable New York. City government should leverage its convening powers to bring together CUNY, a consortia of NYC-based private teaching colleges, the Department of Education, the Health Department, local civil rights organizations, philanthropies, and social-justice oriented tech innovators to consider—and execute—new approaches and ideas. Remote technology, for example, could be used to recruit and retain senior educators as coaches and expand students' access to school nurses, mental health counselors, social workers, and college and career advisors. New compensation and benefits packages for teachers, especially those who work on-site, could send a message about just how 'essential' they really are. With the right training, support, and compensation, public school educators could make every neighborhood in New York more healthy and more prosperous.

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## 8. **Upskill school workers into coaches to get kids moving again through sports**

Udai Tambar, CEO and President, New York Junior Tennis & Learning

After the extreme isolation of the pandemic, sports can help New York City's youth get outside, bond with their peers, and improve their physical and mental health. But there is currently a shortage of youth sports coaches which limits where students can play certain sports. The mayor should invest in New York's youth and its school workers by launching an initiative to upskill those workers into sports coaches. The Department of Youth and Community Development could partner with sports organizations across the five boroughs to create training hubs for first-time coaches and those with the potential to increase their capacity. Many organizations have already developed useful coaching curricula for sports like tennis, track, soccer, baseball, and others deemed less risky by the National Federation of State High School Associations. An intentional pipeline of coaches would include workers who already manage after-school programs as well as recent college graduates and current CUNY students. Earning a coaching credential would boost wages for these workers—and the health of tens of thousands of young New Yorkers.

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## 9. **Integrate early childhood education by helping providers blend government funding and private tuition**

Alan van Capelle, President and CEO, Educational Alliance

Diversity is fundamental for high-quality early childhood education. A large body of research underscores the cognitive and social benefits of diverse classrooms: preschool children in socioeconomically mixed classrooms demonstrate greater growth. Yet New York City's community-based pre-K programs, which represent approximately half of children enrolled in universal pre-K, tend to be racially and socioeconomically homogeneous. This is largely because they rely on government funding from Head Start, childcare vouchers, and Child Care Development Block Grants, which strictly regulate income eligibility and often result in higher concentrations of need. As New York City increases its early childhood education offerings, leaders should facilitate the blending of public funding and private tuition to ensure more diverse classrooms. To minimize the bureaucracy providers must navigate, administrative tasks associated with blended funding should be managed by the DOE's central office. The city should also advocate at the federal level for more efficient blending of Head Start funds with other programmatic funds. Allowing early childhood programs to easily blend different types of funding will create more diverse learning environments and improve education equity for the youngest New Yorkers and their families.

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## 10. **Create new programs, informed by data, to support Covid orphans**

Eric Brettschneider, Senior Fellow, Institute for State and Local Governance, CUNY; former First Deputy Commissioner, NYC Administration for Children Services

More than 1 in every 200 children across New York City has lost a parent or caregiver to COVID, nearly double the national rate. The trauma created when a primary caregiver dies is immense and these children face unprecedented obstacles. Although many of them have not entered the welfare system, it does not necessarily mean that they are safe or that their needs are being met. Indeed, most children orphaned by COVID have



pursued assistance through informal channels that don't address holistic wellbeing. In order to serve a population that largely remains a mystery to the welfare system, the city should first work with advocacy groups, educators, health experts, and universities to assess its scale and analyze its needs. Surveying COVID orphans and then examining data in aggregate form will help researchers avoid violating confidentiality or being overly intrusive. Leaders should then use this information to design responsive policies and programs to support the population over time. In light of the disproportionate impact COVID has had on people of color, effectively caring for children who lost a parent is essential to promoting equity.

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## **11. Assemble a youth council to advise the mayor's office**

**Alicia Guevara, CEO, Big Brothers Big Sisters NYC**

There's little doubt that building a more equitable economy will require major new investments in the city's youth. During the pandemic, an alarming number of young people across the five boroughs fell behind academically and dropped out of CUNY or deferred plans to attend college. Young adults were also significantly more likely to lose work than most other workers. To ensure that the effective steps are taken, city leaders will need to make sure the city's youth have a seat at the decision-making table. One important step is to empower the city's Youth Leadership Councils (YLCs). Although YLCs already exist as a constellation of groups across the five boroughs, there is a need for a single, unified, city-wide youth council. The mayor's office should work with YLCs and public schools to assemble a youth council that can speak on behalf of children throughout the city and help shape new policies. Lawmakers would benefit from the perspective of youth who are creative and hungry for change while students would gain insight into the process of policy creation and build the skills they need to succeed as adults.

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## **12. Create a major new push to support disconnected youth**

**John Mollenkopf, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center; Director, Center for Urban Research**

Even before the onset of COVID-19, one in every eight New Yorkers between the ages of 16 and 24 were both out of school without graduating and out of work. The massive job losses and educational disruptions of the pandemic have likely greatly increased that number. More than 75 percent of these disconnected youth are Black and Latinx, and without intervention will suffer long-term negative effects on their health, employment prospects, earning power, and opportunity to reach their full potential. In order to build a more equitable economy, the city should help these young, at-risk New Yorkers get back on the path to long-term career success. Though many programs exist to serve disconnected youth, to date they have been scattered across different city agencies. This mayor has an opportunity to get them to work together more cohesively around a clear policy with a common set of objectives. This might begin by making sure each at risk young person is connected with one of them. The goal would be to improve the transition to adulthood for more than 60,000 New Yorkers, all of whom have the potential to be successful students and professionals.

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## **13. Equip NYC's public education system to meet students' cultural needs**

**Betsy Cohen, Executive Director, Youth Communication**

The pandemic deepened racial inequities across New York City's public school system. Even before school closures and widespread learning loss, there were troubling achievement gaps in reading and math proficiency

between white and Black students, and white and Latinx students. To close these gaps, New York City should create learning environments that are responsive to students' cultural backgrounds. Educators who understand the identities of their students can more effectively convey information and make topics relevant to them. The city should train its 75,000 public school teachers to integrate social and emotional learning into their curricula, actively drawing upon and supporting their students' cultural backgrounds. Training should focus on real-life case studies of students who have felt alienated at school as opposed to more abstract, divisive political concepts. Institutionalizing culturally responsive learning techniques will lift up students who have long felt overlooked by the public school system and send a strong message to all students, families, and educators: diversity enhances learning.

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## **14. Invest 10 percent of city workforce dollars in training for parents**

**Anthony Tassi, CEO, Literacy Partners**

Not all jobs are created equal. Each one impacts family wellbeing, economic output, and the overall health of society in different ways. One particular job—parenting—is of greater strategic importance than all the others, because it influences the performance of every other job in the economy. Data has consistently shown that the quality of relationships children have with their adult caregivers in their first 1,000 days of life—be they protective and nurturing or abusive and chaotic—has more influence over academic results, physical and mental health, and lifetime workforce outcomes than any other factor. Yet, there is strikingly little training or support for parents on how to be effective caregivers during this critical period. One consequence of this is that an alarming number of the youngest New Yorkers, including a disproportionate number of New Yorkers of color, fall behind during these crucial years and stay behind into adulthood, often impacting their ability to access well-paying jobs. To improve economic outcomes later in life, city leaders should invest in occupational training for their parents with a focus on building healthy, nurturing relationships. Returns to the economy from investments in parenting will dwarf those from traditional short-term workforce interventions.

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## **15. Integrate youth voices into city policymaking**

**The Youth Steering Committee of the NYC Youth Agenda representing Citizens Committee for Children, CUNY's Intergenerational Change Initiative, the YVote, and Next Generation Politics**

If city officials are serious about creating an inclusive economy and expanding economic mobility in New York City, they should include the voices and lived experiences of young people across the five boroughs. We have surveyed thousands of youth across the city and know that only about 50 percent of them feel prepared to accomplish the next thing they want to do in life personally, academically, and professionally. We need far more opportunities that equip us for professional and economic success. Young people are the best positioned to understand the needs and concerns of other young people across socioeconomic, racial, gender, religious, sexual and gender identity lines and to share our collective concerns in constructive ways that can shape the thinking of decision-makers. But while young people will be the most impacted by the decisions being made today, we do not have a place at most decision-making tables. To change this, city leaders can take several steps, such as designating a position on community boards to a member under 25 to oversee youth and community outreach opportunities, and engaging youth in auditing the efficacy of city agencies in addressing youth needs as part of the work undertaken by the Comptroller's Office. Young people would love to work in collaboration with city leaders to ensure that we can survive and thrive in NYC—and that we can afford to grow up and live here as adults. But we need a seat at the table to do so.

# 2

Expand  
opportunities  
for **work-based  
learning**

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## **16. Build the infrastructure needed to launch 10,000 new youth apprenticeships by 2026**

Barbara Chang, Executive Director, CareerWise New York

To help thousands more young New Yorkers get on the path to rewarding careers, New York City should make a major new effort to expand youth apprenticeship. Apprenticeship programs are highly effective in addressing two of the biggest challenges in our education system: the need to earn income while learning to help families make ends meet and the disconnect between what's learned in the classroom and what skills are most in-demand in the workplace. Young people who participate in apprenticeship programs get paid while they train and gain valuable context for why the skills they're developing can open doors to exciting and well-paying careers—ensuring that far more young people persist through high school, an associate's degree, and beyond. The problem is that New York City's youth apprenticeship infrastructure remains very small in scale. Our CareerWise New York program has the capacity to train about 300 young people each year, when the need is there to serve thousands. Fortunately, the Adams administration and the city's private sector have embraced the power of this model and are already taking steps to grow it. To reach the next level, New York's leaders should set a goal to launch thousands of new youth apprenticeships by 2026 and rally the private sector to bring on youth apprentices at scale. City government can help by providing a wage subsidy for the first year of training, linked to a minimum number of new apprenticeship positions. Government could also launch a competitive grant to develop apprenticeship training manuals, providing a practical handbook for integrating apprenticeship training into employers' day-to-day operations.

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## **17. Require work-based learning opportunities for all high school students and connect them to CUNY**

Claudia Schrader, President, Kingsborough Community College

To build a more equitable economy in New York City and greatly expand access to employment opportunities for underrepresented New Yorkers, new steps should be taken to provide hands-on work-based learning opportunities for all high school students. More than just exploring careers from a classroom, immersive career experiences can motivate young people to pursue a college degree or credential with a clear goal in mind, improving chances of success and spurring the development of the knowledge and skills needed to participate in a thriving local economy. To achieve this, the city should provide required experiential work-based learning opportunities for high school students starting with those neighborhoods with the greatest economic needs. These experiences—including internships, cooperative education (co-ops), and project-based assignments—will provide students with hands-on opportunities to explore potential career pathways and understand next steps toward those career goals. After completing high school, graduates who continue to participate in an internship or co-op experience with an employer should receive stipends for their participation along with funding to support full-time enrollment in a related program of study at a CUNY community college. Upon completion, graduates will have both the work experience and credentials needed to obtain full-time employment in their chosen fields.



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## **18. Level the playing field for public school students by creating more paid internships that offer academic credit for their experience**

Jason Duchin, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, DreamYard Project

In terms of building a resume, learning new skills, and establishing a network of professional contacts, internships are the best way to connect youth with high-quality employment opportunities. Yet many internship opportunities are currently out of reach for New York City's public school students, the vast majority of whom can't afford to do unpaid work or forego school credit. To level the playing field between private and public school students, the city should make work experience far more accessible. The first step is to give public high school students academic credit for work experience. The city should reform its Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) standards, so that teachers are no longer required to be present on site in order for interns to receive credit. The second step is to offer tax credits to businesses to host paid interns. In addition to incentivizing more companies to hire high schoolers—at virtually no cost to them—this would allow students who must work to earn money the ability to gain professional experience in various fields. More equitable pathways to employment could transform New York City and be replicated across the country.

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## **19. Create a 1,000-student, CUNY-wide paid internship program in partnership with the private sector**

Madhuri Kommareddi, former Director of Workforce Development, New York State

One of the most powerful ways that city leaders can help expand access to good jobs is by boosting the number of CUNY students with internship experience. Today, only about 10 percent of CUNY students report participating in a paid internship during their college careers. In an economy where work experience is just as important, if not more so, than academic credentials, this gap is a major obstacle to creating a more equitable economy. To address this, city leaders should work to help dramatically boost the supply of paid internships available to CUNY students and support more students in accessing them. Mayor Adams should convene CUNY and employers to launch a new CUNY-wide paid internship program, working with training providers and other nonprofit intermediaries to help vet and prepare students to succeed in these programs. Government could provide a subsidy to help offset at least part of the cost of the internship and work with employers to design internships that work better for everyone—including shorter four-to-six week internships that can be offered multiple times per year and programs outside the traditional summer season. By focusing on boosting the number of internships available to CUNY students, city leaders can help foster career success and make progress toward a more equitable economy.

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## **20. Remove barriers that prevent undocumented teens from participating in the Summer Youth Employment Program**

Brian Cohen, Executive Director, Beam Center

New York City's summer youth employment programs (SYEP) have helped tens of thousands of teens explore new career pathways, gain critical workplace experience, and ultimately access good paying jobs. But many undocumented youth are being left behind, largely because there is no official system in place with which to pay them. Both the DOE and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) currently have

their own workarounds and payment mechanisms. In order to make paid summer internships more accessible to undocumented teens, the city should establish a streamlined system using tax IDs, which are issued regardless of immigration status. A new system would allow undocumented individuals to access critical internships while being paid safely and efficiently.

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## **21. Develop and expand K-12 programs to prepare young New Yorkers for careers in the legal profession and other industries**

### **B. Seth Bryant, Managing Partner, Bryant Rabbino LLP**

New York City needs programs in its public schools that will expose K-12 students to middle- and high-wage career paths, help them develop specialized skills, and connect them to work-based opportunities. These programs should focus on key industry groups such as the legal profession, which has some of the highest average salaries and a longstanding need to diversify its workforce. A recent study prepared by the Enhance Diversity in the Legal Profession Task Force of the New York City Bar Association found that in New York City, with more than one million students and approximately 55,000 attorneys, there are currently only about 30 “pipeline” programs for legal careers serving less than 3,500 students. To prepare more young people of color and more young women for careers in the legal profession, the New York City Bar Association, other bar associations, and law firms should partner with the DOE to expand existing pipeline programs and launch new ones. Other industries such as finance, banking, and media could make similar efforts. The DOE should partner with leaders in these fields to recruit volunteer mentors who can expose New York City school children to different career opportunities. Law firms and other industry groups that participate in these “each one, teach one” focused programs stand to benefit greatly: a robust pipeline of talented workers who are truly representative of New York City’s diversity will keep them competitive. New York City will benefit, too, as more graduates enter their chosen professions and build wealth and stronger communities.

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## **22. Provide paid internship opportunities for undocumented youth**

### **Vanessa Luna, Co-Founder and Chief Program Officer, ImmSchools**

There are an estimated 38,000 undocumented students in New York City, who, because of their immigration status, have few opportunities to engage in post-secondary opportunities through the DOE’s internship programs. The city has the opportunity to change that by expanding SYEP eligibility to include all students regardless of immigration status, partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs) and other entities to host students, and partnering with private companies to fund paid internships for undocumented youth. Such opportunities would expose young New Yorkers to different professions, provide valuable work experience, and ultimately help them to launch the well-paid careers driving New York’s economy. In the past, New York City has been at the forefront of including and supporting immigrant communities. In 2015, for example, the city launched the IDNYC program, which provides free municipal ID cards to all residents regardless of their immigration status. The next step is to ensure the city’s youth, regardless of immigration status, have access to the formative work experience they need to succeed.

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## **23. Create private sector internships for transition-age youth**

**Keith Little, President and CEO, SCO Family of Services**

Young adults currently or formerly in foster care are significantly more likely to experience unemployment, with about half unemployed at the age of 24 and as many as 20 percent becoming homeless upon aging out of foster care. While many nonprofit human services organizations receive funding from the city to provide internships for transition age youth, it's time for the private sector to step up, too. The city should incentivize private sector employers to create paid internships by pre-screening qualified interns and covering a portion of their wages. Such a program would help employers find ambitious interns and build a pipeline of skilled talent. It would also help foster youth—the majority of whom are Black and Hispanic—gain relevant skills, build relationships with mentors, and secure good jobs. Paired with access to affordable housing, better work opportunities for adult foster youth would reduce their chances of experiencing homelessness and incarceration, and boost their chance to contribute to a more inclusive, more equitable economy.

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## **24. Launch a city-wide program for internships at nonprofit organizations**

**Marvin Krislov, President, Pace University**

The hands-on, practical experience internships provide is crucial to students' success: students who participate in internships are more likely to graduate from college and launch well-paid careers afterward. Unfortunately, internships are often only available to those who can afford to work without pay. At the same time, there are more than 40,000 nonprofit organizations in New York City, many of which are understaffed and overburdened in the wake of the pandemic. The city should launch a new paid internship program to connect qualified students with CBOs in need of motivated staff. The program would provide more equitable access to internships as well as much-needed support for nonprofits delivering critical services. Leaders should look to Pace University's New York Resilience Internship program, which launched in 2020, and provides funded internships to students working in nonprofits like the Ronald McDonald House, the YMCA of Greater New York, and United Way. Pace found philanthropic support for the program by leveraging a multiplier effect: donors could fund internships that not only helped students but also provided workers to organizations they believed in. Implementing a similar model citywide would have enormous impact, creating opportunities for thousands of low-income students and helping nonprofits better serve millions of New Yorkers.

# 3

**Expand access  
to good jobs by  
improving and  
expanding career  
training**



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## 25. Help employers diversify their talent pipeline

Winston Fisher, Partner, Fisher Brothers; Co-Chair,  
NYC Regional Economic Development Council

There's a lot that the public sector can do on its own to build a more equitable economy in New York, but progress will be limited without significant involvement from the city's private employers. The good news is that a growing number of New York-based companies are deeply interested in building a pipeline of diverse talent from underserved communities. The problem is that many either don't know where to begin or how to access the talent they are looking for, and many others who start out on this path encounter a frustrating set of obstacles. While some employers manage to overcome these challenges, many others give up. The result is a disappointingly small number of one-off employer projects, instead of a vast ecosystem of opportunity that New York so badly needs right now. City leaders can help by developing a coherent system that makes it far easier for a range of employers to build effective paid internships, establish on-the-job training programs, and invest in other high-impact pathways programs. For example, the city could set up a one-stop resource center—backed up by a small staff of city employees—that would alert employers about best practices, provide crucial advice on how to set up successful programs, and help connect employers to entities that are well-positioned to help them access the candidates they are seeking. To move this forward, the mayor should establish a board made up of public and private sector leaders that charts a path for this new system.

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## 26. Create an economic mobility outcomes fund

Andi Phillips, Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Maycomb Capital

There is broad agreement among policymakers that New York needs to make significant progress in expanding economic mobility, but it's also clear that no single policy or program will be sufficient, and that government doesn't have all the answers. To develop a variety of solutions that New York needs right now, city leaders should launch an Economic Mobility Outcomes Fund that seeks innovative programmatic approaches from a range of nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and social entrepreneurs—and invests in the approaches that can demonstrate actual outcomes. Using dollars from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Fund would support programs already producing results in communities across New York, enabling them to scale up, or seed promising new initiatives. Importantly, however, in a break from business-as-usual, it would ask applicants to propose solutions, outline the intended outcomes, and propose what the Fund should pay as outcomes are achieved. Unlike typical government programs—only a small fraction of which are funded based on performance outcomes—the organizations selected by the Fund would be paid only when outcomes are achieved. In the interim, these organizations could seek working capital loans from impact investors, who may also share the risk of impact, with repayment based on the achievement of outcomes and loan forgiveness if outcomes fall short. The result would be a bottom-up approach to solving New York's biggest challenges with transparency and accountability baked in.

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## 27. Challenge NYC's largest employers to develop new pathway programs that would open doors for New Yorkers of color

Kristen Titus, former Chief Technology and Innovation Officer, New York State

One of the biggest barriers to an equitable economy in New York has been that so many New Yorkers of color have been effectively shut out of opportunities to access the family-sustaining jobs that are growing in the city.

Changing this will require a lot more of the city’s employers to step up and develop new programs that allow a diverse mix of New Yorkers to gain work experience at their companies and get on the path to full-time jobs. City leaders can help make this happen by giving employers a push in the right direction, leveraging city workforce funding, and making it as easy as possible for company leaders to roll out new programs. As a first step, Mayor Adams should bring a group of the city’s largest employers to the table and challenge each of them to develop a single new career pathway program that would open doors inside their company. Each company would have a certain amount of time—perhaps six months—to develop and implement a demonstration project that works for them, such as a four-week paid work experience for a 16-to-24 year old, an accelerated on-the-job training program, or an apprenticeship. To support these efforts, city leaders could help employers tap into city workforce dollars that most companies don’t even know exist. The city should also monitor the results, and then push even more city-based employers to implement the pathway models that work best.

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## **28. Provide Internet-enabled laptops to New Yorkers enrolled in workforce development programs**

**Danae McLeod, Executive Director, Grace Institute and Outreach**

Workforce training programs, particularly those that target women, are critical to helping low-income women without college degrees access well-paid jobs and achieve upward mobility. During the pandemic, many training programs shifted online, removing the barriers of transportation and childcare for many participants and helping them build essential computer skills at a faster pace. But women without internet access at home, or the devices necessary to access it, were left behind. In 2020, 19 percent of Grace Institute’s workforce training cohort were forced to drop out because they did not have internet access, even though the program provided free laptops. Staff began helping participants sign up for home broadband and access free WiFi where available, and found that many participants who were able to stick with their training programs were mothers of K-12 students, who, after school hours, could access their children’s internet-enabled laptops, which had been distributed by the DOE for remote learning. With more transparent knowledge about how the DOE procured and distributed this technology, as well as dedicated funding, the city and its nonprofit partners could provide every low-income woman enrolled in a workforce development program with an internet-enabled laptop of her own. More low-income women could learn how to use tools like Excel, Outlook, Teams, dramatically strengthening their resumes, expanding their job prospects, and boosting their income.

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## **29. Make community colleges the centerpiece of a citywide strategy to help reskill New Yorkers for a changing economy**

**Larry D. Johnson, President, Guttman Community College**

To lay the groundwork for a more equitable economy in New York, city leaders will need to develop new infrastructure to support lifelong learning and continual reskilling—helping New Yorkers keep pace with a changing economy. There is no better ally in this task than the city’s community colleges, which are uniquely capable of helping both traditional and non-traditional students from underresourced communities to earn in-demand certificates, credentials, and degrees that meet the needs of employers and lead to family-sustaining wages. However, realizing this vision will require a new level of coordination and commitment from city leaders, CUNY, and community-based partner organizations. City leaders can start by launching a major new effort to help New Yorkers who lost jobs because of the pandemic or left employment because they weren’t earning enough to reskill via CUNY. This effort should include new partnerships with CBOs to recruit returning students and a

focus on working directly with employers to assess and launch new industry-recognized credential collaboratives in fields from technology and healthcare to the creative sector and emerging green economy. By making CUNY the centerpiece of a citywide reskilling effort, New York can help far more residents achieve family-sustaining employment while strengthening the city's economy with an increasingly skilled and diverse workforce.

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### **30. Train and support 100,000 older adults in launching second careers and entrepreneurial ventures**

**Angie Kamath, Dean, NYU School of Professional Studies**

New York City is home to 1.1 million older adults, a population projected to grow 40 percent over the next two decades. To build a stronger and more equitable economy for the long term, New York will need to launch and expand initiatives designed to enable far more older adults to retrain for new employment opportunities, launch transitional or second careers, and pursue entrepreneurship. The majority of older adults are job experienced and many are looking for ways to remain productive in their retirement or seeking income-sustaining opportunities out of necessity, given the cost of living in New York. However, relatively little support infrastructure exists today to help facilitate these transitions. New York City should change this by launching a major new initiative focused on helping older New Yorkers develop the skills and connections needed to thrive professionally in later years. City leaders can begin by partnering with New York University's School of Professional Studies on a bold new program, the Purposeful Retirement Education and Planning (PREP100) initiative, which would train and assist 100,000 older New Yorkers over the next 10 years with workforce training, digital skills, entrepreneurship, and career development planning. By working together with government, CBOs, and higher education institutions, this initiative can expand career-focused support for New York's growing older adult population and unlock economic opportunity in communities citywide.

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### **31. Scale up economic mobility programs that have already demonstrated results for clients and communities**

**Doug Bauer, Executive Director, The Clark Foundation**

Government officials in New York too often resort to launching new pilot programs as the default response for tackling major policy challenges. But as city officials confront one of the biggest policy challenges of today—the need to build a more equitable economy—they should instead embrace a strategy that would have a far greater impact: scaling up existing programs that have already proven effective. New York City is blessed to have an array of successful economic mobility initiatives already in place. Sadly, however, too many of them operate at a modest scale. Instead of seeding new initiatives that will serve relatively few people, it's time for City Hall to launch an effort that identifies the most successful economic opportunity programs already in place and invests new resources to help them greatly expand their reach and impact.

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### **32. Expand workforce training stipends to help more low-income New Yorkers participate in high-quality career training programs**

Virginia Knox, President, MDRC

After decades of study, policymakers now know a lot about the kinds of skills training that make a difference for people's earnings. For example, sector-focused training, like New York City's own Per Scholas program, can increase employment in targeted sectors, boost long-term earnings and career advancement, and reduce racial inequities in labor market outcomes. The challenge is that even tuition-free career training can be out of reach for lower-income New Yorkers who are juggling work and caregiving responsibilities. For many working adults, committing to a full-time program—even if it's free—is all but impossible. And unlike a first-time college student who could apply for federal Pell grants and state tuition assistance funding, there is almost no financial aid available for participants in career training programs. That's why city policymakers should step in and develop a cash stipend to help offset the living expenses of low-income New Yorkers pursuing high-quality career training, making these effective programs more accessible to the New Yorkers who have the most to gain. Over the past year, the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity has been testing the use of stipends for participants in training, aiming to bring a skills upgrade within financial reach for more New Yorkers. New York should continue to test, refine, and expand this approach in the months and years ahead with the goal of helping many more New Yorkers access the sort of high-quality but time-intensive career training that consistently leads to higher-paying jobs.

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### **33. Follow the state of Maryland's lead and remove degree requirements from thousands of city government jobs**

Lannia Small, Director of Global Strategy and Partnerships,  
Social Impact, Indeed

Tens of thousands of eminently qualified New Yorkers have been shut out of well-paying jobs simply because they don't meet what is often an unnecessary requirement for the positions they seek: they lack a college degree. Although a college credential is still essential for many jobs in today's economy, research now makes it clear that a significant number of positions—particularly in the IT, administrative, and customer service sectors—could be ably filled by workers who bring considerable skills but don't have a degree. In March 2022, the state of Maryland officially eliminated the four-year college degree requirement from thousands of state jobs, instantly making those positions accessible to residents who don't have a college degree but have other experience or training—and eliminating a major barrier to economic success for numerous people of color. New York City should follow Maryland's lead. Mayor Adams should work with the city's top workforce and labor officials to identify thousands of jobs in city government for which a four-year degree is currently required but which could reasonably be filled by jobseekers who are assessed to be skilled through alternative ways—and then announce that the city is eliminating degree requirements for those positions. The city's lead could set the table for other employers in New York to follow suit.



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### **34. Retrain New Yorkers for better jobs by providing scholarships for short-term career training programs at CUNY**

Kenneth Adams, President, LaGuardia Community College

As city leaders consider ways to help address New York’s stubbornly high unemployment rate—while expanding pathways to family-sustaining careers—short-term career training programs can help. CUNY’s array of adult career and continuing education programs offer New Yorkers the practical training needed to access new careers and better-paying jobs in a matter of weeks or months rather than years. The problem is that too few of the low-income New Yorkers who could benefit the most from these programs are able to afford them. That’s because these programs are generally not covered by existing sources of federal financial aid, such as Pell Grants. To help address this gap, Governor Hochul and state legislators recently expanded the state’s tuition assistance program to serve students enrolled in career training programs. Now city leaders can double down on this much-needed change by launching a new scholarship program specially for short-term career training programs at CUNY. This program would ideally combine an easy-to-access tuition scholarship with a block grant for colleges to support the advising, counseling, and career services needed to maximize student success. By making short-term career training affordable and accessible to many more New Yorkers, city leaders can help boost economic mobility and spur a more equitable and lasting economic recovery.

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### **35. Leverage NYC’s research universities to spark well-paying jobs in emerging industries and create a more broad-based economy**

Andrew Hamilton, President, NYU

New York often overlooks the potential of its own major research universities to advance municipal priorities, including expanding economic opportunity. Institutions like NYU, CUNY, Columbia, and Cornell Tech are at the forefront of discoveries, innovation, and training, and could be better leveraged to grow emerging industries that can create thousands of well-paying jobs for a diverse mix of New Yorkers. For example, there is still significant untapped potential in digital gaming, cybersecurity, and AI—fast-growing sectors where New York’s universities can help seed new research-driven start-ups. While New York is already seeing growth in these areas, increased collaboration between the city’s research universities and the Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) could bring this growth to an entirely different level. Mayor Adams made a promising start by launching a new digital gaming program at City College with the support of NYU’s Game Center. His administration should build on that momentum and deepen the city’s own investment in these and other emerging industries that match New York’s research and academic strength. NYCEDC should form a university economic development and expansion advisory group to identify opportunities to leverage the city’s research and talent advantages and expand workforce pipelines for all New Yorkers. City leaders should also create a strategic innovation seed fund to spark new initiatives in emerging sectors for which New York has considerable promise.

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### **36. Create a workforce development surcharge on large employers**

Darren Bloch, CEO and Executive Director, Greenwich House

A diverse and ready workforce is the engine that drives New York’s economy. Well before COVID-19 and the strain the pandemic placed on the city’s talent pipelines, there was a well-identified shortage of coordination and funding for the robust workforce development systems the city requires. Historically, the only entity funding

and managing that system at scale has been local government, through the DOE, CUNY and SUNY systems, and investments across various city agencies. The beneficiaries of all that investment—employers around the region—have not invested directly in that pipeline or played a sufficient role in directing any funds. It’s time to change this by implementing a workforce development surcharge on employers with more than 100 employees. The funds generated by the surcharge could be managed by the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development and deployed with the review and approval of the existing Workforce Investment Board or another body of contributing local employers. It’s long past time that local employers had a more formal role building and directly investing in a workforce development system that supports the extraordinary diversity and talent of New York.

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### **37. Provide public matching funds for highly effective job training programs**

**Scott Thomas, Co-Founder, Arbor Rising**

In 2021, more than 184,000 New Yorkers aged 18-24 were out of school and out of work, an 80 percent increase from before the pandemic in 2019. Without investment in these young people, the city is at risk of losing out on a generation of talent. The good news is that a number of nonprofits dedicated to job training, especially those focused on preparing New Yorkers for positions in the tech industry, are demonstrating the potential to launch young folks without college degrees into family-sustaining careers. Unfortunately, while philanthropic support for these innovative training programs has been growing, total foundation investments account for less than \$100 million per year, which, divided between the 18-24 year-old cohort alone amounts to roughly \$500 per person—not nearly enough to transform their prospects. To meet the need for these programs, the city should start investing in these successful models directly. First, they should gather data on the “return on investment” of workforce development nonprofits, calculating the long-term wage gains per dollar invested adjusted for the population served. Once the most promising organizations have been identified, the city should support them by matching philanthropic giving with public dollars. With care, this approach could better leverage the work of discerning philanthropic funders, cut the cost of philanthropic capital in half, and redefine the terms of success.

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### **38. Remove employment barriers for immigrant professionals**

**Kyung Yoon, President, Korean American Community Foundation**

Thousands of skilled immigrants who worked as nurses and teachers in their home countries face workplace barriers in New York that prevent them from getting jobs in their field of expertise, often relegating them to low-wage work in nail salons, dry cleaners, and grocery stores. The city should leverage the existing skills of so many immigrants by helping them translate their international experience and credentials to the job market here. Working with the nonprofit UpwardlyGlobal, which connects un- and under-employed immigrants with pathways to professional success, the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development should work to address employment barriers for immigrant professionals. Multilingual skill-building, networking and other workforce development programs could help internationally trained professionals prepare for careers in healthcare, education, finance, tech, and other fields with stable work and higher pay. Both public and private employers could be incentivized to implement more inclusive hiring practices and access more diverse pipelines of talent. And advocacy at the state level could lead to the reform of occupational licensing requirements to prevent unnecessary exclusion of experienced immigrant professionals. A more equitable New York City is one in which immigrants can fully contribute and thrive.

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### **39. Strengthen the workforce development pipeline for New Yorkers with disabilities**

Diosdado Gica, President of Programs and Operations,  
ICD-Institute for Career Development

One million people in New York City have disabilities and they are disproportionately unemployed and underemployed. In 2021, nearly 17 percent of New Yorkers of working age with a disability were unemployed. These potential workers continue to face a range of employment barriers: they often have nontraditional education backgrounds and gaps in their resumes, and many employers still hold negative assumptions about their potential job performance. In order to build an economy that includes workers with disabilities, the mayor and city council should launch a major new initiative to expand their employment opportunities. This should include targeted job training and pre-training, paid apprenticeships, and transition services, like ICD's new School to Success program, designed to support youth with disabilities as they make the jump from school to career. All too often, NYC students with disabilities leave high school without resources, leaving many disproportionately vulnerable to involvement in the justice system, poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness. In addition, using tax benefits, employment goals, and other tools at its disposal, the city should incentivize employers to overcome their hesitancy and hire workers with disabilities. A strong start would be to expand and adapt MWBE legislation to include people with disabilities, as well as setting goals for government contractors. All federal contractors, for example, aim for 7 percent of their workforce to represent people with disabilities. Such policies could shift New York City's hiring culture so that far more people with disabilities have the chance to land well-paid jobs and advance in their fields.

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### **40. Make digital literacy a fundamental part of every CUNY education by launching a universal introductory computer science course**

Ann Kirschner, Entrepreneur; former University Professor,  
CUNY Graduate Center

Many CUNY students are the first in their families to go to college and pursue higher education as a springboard to a career. However, most students arrive with only limited awareness of the career pathways available to them—in particular, of the wide range of good jobs in the city's vibrant tech sector. If policymakers want to succeed in helping New Yorkers currently underrepresented in the tech sector to break into these careers, more needs to be done to ensure that every student is exposed to computing education and computing careers from the beginning of college. Otherwise, the field self-selects to be disproportionately white and male—even at CUNY, which otherwise reflects the full scope of the city's diversity. To address this disconnect, city leaders should help CUNY develop and launch a high-quality, online introductory computer science course that has no math prerequisites, provides applied rather than theoretical skills, takes an interdisciplinary approach for maximum relevance, and is project-based for building collaborative skills. A hybrid online course can enable scale while allowing individual units to be taught by industry professionals as well as CUNY faculty. To help recruit the next generation of diverse tech talent, the city should offer this course as an all-borough free gateway class—like an all-city book read—marketed through the city's transit system and communications channels.

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#### **41. Bring film and TV jobs into the city's Workforce1 Career Center system and institute community hiring goals for film and TV productions**

Rafael Espinal, Executive Director, Freelancers Union;  
former NYC Council Member

New York City's film and television industry has added thousands of good jobs in recent years, including many that are accessible to workers without a four-year college degree. However, New Yorkers of color and those from lower-income communities remain seriously underrepresented in the industry. To create a more equitable economy in the future, city leaders will need to double down on expanding access to jobs in film and TV, from camera operators and sound technicians to set designers and video editors. While there's much that the industry itself should do—including new efforts by studios, production companies, and unions to change their recruitment and hiring practices—there's a lot that city officials can tackle, too. For instance, the city's Workforce1 Career Centers connect jobseekers with openings in a broad range of industries, from healthcare to manufacturing. But to date, film and TV jobs have not been included. Mayor Adams should work with the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment and the Department of Small Business Services to bring film and TV jobs into the city's Workforce 1 Career Center system and work with partners to offer free, employer-guided training aligned with those openings. New York should also explore ways to institute community hiring goals for film and TV productions, such as legislation requiring productions that receive state subsidies to prioritize low-income New Yorkers and New Yorkers from high-poverty communities for job opportunities.

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#### **42. Partner with CUNY to create a one-stop-shop clearinghouse matching employers and students for internships, fellowships, and jobs**

Rhonda Binda, Associate Adjunct Professor,  
Medgar Evers and Queens Colleges

New York City has no better asset in building a more equitable economy than CUNY. Each year, more than 50,000 students—the majority of whom come from lower-income households—graduate from CUNY with a degree or other credential, opening doors to economic opportunity. However, too many CUNY students struggle to connect with employers for paid internships and jobs, limiting the impact of a degree and standing in the way of career success. To address this disconnect, city leaders should focus on making CUNY much easier for employers to navigate. Other colleges and universities have the resources needed to roll out the red carpet for employers and offer a multitude of ways to meet and recruit current students—investments that lead to better outcomes for their graduates. To help more CUNY students gain work experience in the industries of the future and launch well-paying careers, city leaders should partner with CUNY to create a one-stop-shop clearinghouse matching employers and students for internships, fellowships, and jobs. Rather than obligating employers to navigate separate career offices across 25 campuses, this centralized employer portal would provide a single point of contact for companies interested in hiring CUNY students and provide them with one-on-one support. By making it much easier for employers to connect with CUNY, city leaders can leverage the system's scale and diversity while improving post-college outcomes for graduates.

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### **43. Launch 1,000 apprenticeships for diverse and low-income New Yorkers to gain access to tech careers**

Dan Teran, Managing Partner, Gutter Capital

Apprenticeship programs that provide paid on-the-job training can be very effective at helping New Yorkers launch into tech careers. However, there are just a handful of such programs in New York today, serving no more than a few hundred residents each year. To build a more equitable economy in New York City, this will have to change. City leaders should seize the opportunity to scale up the number of apprenticeship programs aligned with tech jobs, from software engineers and product managers to technical sales and data analytics positions. To help these programs grow, government should work with employers and training partners to identify apprenticeable roles and develop curricula, subsidize the upfront training costs, and make connections between training organizations and employers—saving companies the cost of recruiters and bootcamps. Once the initial training is completed, the employer would cover the apprentice’s salary, which would increase as their skills and capabilities progress. By launching 1,000 new apprenticeships for diverse and low-income New Yorkers to break into tech careers, city leaders can help boost economic mobility while strengthening the city’s tech sector for the long term.

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### **44. Partner with tech companies to provide free STEM skills education for students, educators, and jobseekers**

Justina Nixon-Saintil, Vice President,  
ESG and Corporate Social Responsibility, IBM

Across the U.S., a historic talent shortage has more than tripled over ten years. Within the technology sector alone there are more than 1.2 million unfilled software-related jobs. By providing free education and training to historically underrepresented communities, New York City has a tremendous opportunity to prepare the next generation of industry leaders while fostering a more equitable society. Building on the city’s legacy as an industry, innovation, and academic world leader, leaders should create new pathways to make STEM education readily available. The city should partner with organizations that offer free access to resources like IBM SkillsBuild—a training program for students, educators, and job seekers with more than 1,000 courses on topics such as hybrid cloud computing, AI, cybersecurity, data analytics, technical support, and project management. Equipped with valuable skills, a diverse workforce will drive both equity and economic growth.

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### **45. Empower the chief of student pathways and remove college degree requirements from government jobs**

Reuben Ogbonna, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Marcy Lab School

New Yorkers from underresourced backgrounds—who need access to jobs that provide economic and social mobility—are poised to meet the exploding demand for talent in New York City’s workforce. Yet many job applications require a college degree, excluding the 5.4 million New Yorkers who hold a high school diploma but not an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. The financial burden, meanwhile, of earning these credentials continues to be debilitating, especially for low-income students of color. Only 34 percent of Black and Latinx students who attend college in the U.S. will graduate in four years, due partly to economic stress. In order to catapult people into life-altering careers rather than burden them with debt, the city needs to create and



support alternatives to higher education so that more employers will eliminate degree requirements. City officials should prioritize the work of the DOE's new chief of student pathways, who oversees post-secondary readiness and work-based learning initiatives. Along with a public show of support at the highest level, the city should significantly increase the budget of the chief's office in order to scale proven alternative programs and lead the way by hiring candidates with diverse educational backgrounds for government jobs. When the highest ranks of government universally recognize robust alternatives to college, employers will follow, and New York City's economy will finally be driven by workers' competency instead of their credentials.

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#### **46. Build innovation hubs in low-income neighborhoods to help young people launch tech careers**

Jessica Santana, Co-Founder and CEO, America on Tech

The tech sector continues to be an engine of economic growth in New York City, creating thousands of well-paying jobs. But few tech companies and start-ups are located anywhere near low-income neighborhoods like Brownsville or Melrose. In order to build a more inclusive tech ecosystem, city leaders should facilitate partnerships between private companies and trusted community organizations to create innovation hubs for teens and New Yorkers in their early 20s. These interactive makerspaces would allow young people to get hands-on experience using 3D printers, animation and graphic design software, filmmaking and recording equipment, and more. Such hubs could also collaborate with tech companies to create or expand existing internships programs and connect them with ambitious young people from East New York, East Harlem, the South Bronx, and other low-income communities, ultimately creating a tech sector that's far more representative.

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#### **47. Remove degree requirements for many government jobs, setting an example for inclusive hiring throughout the economy**

Kate Naranjo, former Director of the STARs Policy Project, Opportunity@Work

In New York City, 1.6 million workers are STARs or workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes. They do not hold bachelor's degrees; instead, they have gained their skills through training programs, associate degree programs at community colleges, or work experience. STARs currently account for 47 percent of workers in the state, including 60 percent of Black workers, but their prospects for economic mobility are limited. As degree requirements have increased nationwide, STARs have been locked out of 7.5 million jobs, and it now takes 30 years for individuals without a bachelor's degree to earn equal wages to workers with those credentials. The City of New York should increase opportunity for these workers without additional spending by leveraging an important asset: city jobs. Removing barriers to hiring across all levels of government and changing the government's hiring behavior by sourcing talent from "alternative" pathways would set a powerful precedent. Many government jobs, from financial managers to HR specialists to IT managers, are in the same fields from which STARs have been excluded. If city government modeled inclusive hiring behavior, millions of skilled New Yorkers would have access to better jobs with better pay.

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## **48. Incentivize employers to remove degree requirements from job descriptions**

Jennifer Stredler, Vice President, Workforce Development, Salesforce

In recent years, it has become the norm for employers to use college as a proxy for ability or readiness for a job. This has led to degree inflation and the exclusion of many talented, driven workers from well-paid professions. New York City should incentivize employers across all five boroughs to review their job descriptions and remove degree requirements that are not absolutely critical. A shift to skills-based and competency-based hiring would enable more New Yorkers of color from low-income backgrounds to access good jobs and higher salaries, and provide employers with a larger, more diverse pool of potential employees.

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## **49. Fund place-based workforce collaboratives**

Ashley Putnam, Director, Economic Growth and Mobility Project, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

The COVID-19 pandemic and remote work significantly shifted where people live and work in cities like New York and Philadelphia. That being said, there is a lot of work to be done to ensure workers are connecting to the good-paying jobs growing in their communities. City leaders can take an important step by investing in and partnering with place-based workforce development collaboratives. These collaboratives—like the Lower East Side Employment Network or the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative—build relationships with employers in their community and encourage them to grow their talent pipelines through internships and skills training, and to hire residents from the neighborhood. Rather than open new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funded career centers in new places, the city should fund existing place-based workforce collaboratives and organizations providing training to residents. The city can incentivize the commitments from local employers with both the carrot—such as investments in training—and the stick—such as economic development requirements. A place-based model would connect workforce development to economic development, so that residents can benefit from the anchor institutions in their neighborhood.

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## **50. Prohibit inquiries about age and date of birth in job applications**

Kevin Jones, Associate State Director, Advocacy, AARP New York

New York City is home to a record 1.6 million New Yorkers aged 60 and over. More than 330,000 older New Yorkers live below the poverty line and many more struggle with financial insecurity, leading them to seek employment. Too often, these older jobseekers—and many older workers already in the workforce—contend with prejudice regarding their age. The city should prohibit employers from requiring age or date of birth on job applications unless the employer can demonstrate why age is relevant to fulfilling the role's responsibilities. Including age and date of birth may prompt prejudice among prospective employers, and some screening algorithms automatically disqualify online applicants based on their age. According to a recent AARP survey, nearly 20 percent of workers ages 40 to 65 said they were passed over for a job because of their age. While experienced older adult workers bring expertise and perspective to a workplace, negative stereotypes and mistaken assumptions about older candidates' abilities too often mean they are treated unfairly. If New York wants to achieve a truly equitable economic recovery, employers will have to assess candidates based on their merits, not their age.

## **51. Invest in soft skill training for underemployed and unemployed New Yorkers**

Orit Lender, CEO, JCC of Staten Island

An alarming number of New Yorkers struggle to access jobs with high pay and opportunities for growth. Rapidly growing sectors like tech and green energy have the potential to expand access to economic mobility, but only if potential workers are equipped with the necessary skills. In addition to technical skills, underemployed and unemployed New Yorkers need soft skills to strengthen their resumes, succeed at interviews, and excel at work. The city should invest in holistic career readiness programs that focus on soft skills such as problem-solving, effective communication, teamwork, and time management. Linking training to social services would help more low-income New Yorkers secure well-paid jobs and succeed in the workplace.

# 4

**Close the wealth gap**  
by investing in minority  
and immigrant  
entrepreneurs,  
financial literacy, and  
community hiring

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## **52. Help more NYC creators of color patent their brilliance as a way of closing racial wealth gaps**

Joseph Scantlebury, President and CEO, Living Cities

New York City boasts one of the top startup ecosystems in the world. Every community across the city is filled with enterprising and entrepreneurial-minded people who create myriads of inventions daily. However, when it comes to protecting such intellectual property, specifically by the ownership of patents, entrepreneurs of color and women lag significantly behind their white and male counterparts. This “patent gap” contributes to inequities in small business ownership and venture investment—and widens the city’s racial wealth gap. Moreover, without the legal protection that patents offer, creators of color without legal representation have their ideas stolen and are deprived of crucial opportunities to monetize their intellectual creation. Addressing and closing the patent gap would help the city take an important step toward a more equitable economy. The city can take steps to ensure that a diverse mix of New Yorkers are aware of the patent process and know how to navigate it. By first playing a convening role, city leaders would bring together knowledgeable legal and business experts from city universities and law firms with enterprising New Yorkers interested in owning and monetizing patents. The city would benefit by helping to expand existing infrastructure, including the Patent Diversity Project at Cardozo School of Law, where students and faculty are working to increase the number of U.S. patents issued to women and inventors of color. In addition, the city can look to partner with community-based entrepreneurship assistance organizations to promote the education and benefits of patent ownership.

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## **53. Help minority entrepreneurs win more city contracts by collateralizing loans for CDFIs through contract assignments**

Connie Evans, President and CEO, Association for Enterprise Opportunity

Obtaining a government contract is one of the best ways for small businesses to expand their revenues and reach a new level of growth, but for years Black- and Hispanic-owned businesses have received a strikingly small share of city procurement opportunities. Changing this could boost the fortunes of minority-owned businesses and help close the glaring wealth gap in New York. Although city leaders have made some progress in increasing the number of eligible minority-owned vendors, many Black and Hispanic entrepreneurs still don’t end up accessing government contracts because they lack the financial resources to complete or even get started on a contract. The Adams administration can change this by developing a uniform process for collateralizing loans for Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) through contract assignments. CDFIs are community-based organizations that are unique in their ability to make small loans and provide counseling to minority- and immigrant-run businesses. Unfortunately, it’s often too risky for CDFIs to provide entrepreneurs with this kind of capital. But the city could solve this challenge by assigning the contract to CDFIs, who would then pass on that amount in loan capital to entrepreneurs. Black and Hispanic entrepreneurs would get the capital they need, the CDFI would be assured of getting its loan capital back, and the city would see a greater share of procurement dollars going to minority-owned businesses. City leaders just need to change regulations that currently prevent contracts from being assigned directly to CDFIs.



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## 54. Tap the purchasing and hiring power of hospitals, universities, and other anchor institutions

Linda Gibbs, Principal for Social Services, Bloomberg Associates;  
former NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services

There is an enormous opportunity to leverage the mighty economic power of New York City's anchor institutions—including hospitals, colleges and universities, utilities, and large established companies—to help the city meet its goal of ensuring an equitable economic recovery. These anchors are among the city's largest employers, have some of the biggest procurement budgets, and are in many cases located in or near the communities that have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis. But New York has barely begun to harness them to help generate community wealth. By making these institutions partners in a concerted public-private partnership, city leaders could convince them to boost their hiring of local residents and make new investments in job training and internships. In addition, there is potential for these anchors to steer more of their massive procurement dollars to local businesses, a change that could help build wealth in these communities and spark local job creation. London Mayor Sadik Khan's COVID recovery plans included a major new effort to tap the city's anchor institutions to invest in the well-being of the communities that were hardest hit by COVID—a process that also revealed that the anchor institutions themselves benefit from efforts to do well by their communities. New York should follow suit. The first step is to use the mayor's power of persuasion to bring anchor institutions to the table and make them partners in a major long-term effort to help build community wealth.

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## 55. Hire MWBE climate tech startups to meet NYC's ambitious green infrastructure goals

Sonam Velani, Founder and CEO, Streetlife Ventures

In fiscal year 2021, the New York City government awarded less than 4 percent of its total procurement spend to firms owned by minority or women entrepreneurs (MWBEs). New York City's Green New Deal presents an enormous opportunity to drastically increase that number. Local Law 97, for example, calls for the city's largest buildings to reduce their emissions 40 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050, which will require massive infrastructure upgrades, from retrofitted windows to new HVAC systems, along with billions of dollars in government spending. Other initiatives such as the new offshore wind developments in the New York Harbor and the goal of sending zero waste to landfill by 2030 are all opportunities to diversify spending while still meeting the city's ambitious climate agenda. The city should leverage its purchasing power and set aggressive targets for hiring MWBE climate tech startups to upgrade its green infrastructure. To help small MWBE companies scale, the city's infrastructure agencies can inform product development cycles for early stage companies, engage in technical assistance, and provide capital through its own balance sheet and pension fund investments. Streamlining the procurement process and helping companies test, iterate, and scale quickly will also help the city meet the urgency of the climate crisis. A combination of reform, supportive services, and goals for which city infrastructure agencies are held accountable will support the development of an equitable climate tech ecosystem in New York City.

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## **56. Use the forthcoming boom in infrastructure spending to create a cohesive small business support system**

Xavier de Souza Briggs, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

No American city has a small business support system that's worthy of that label. What New York and other cities have instead are fragmented programs: entrepreneurs can get capital access in one place and technical assistance in another, while a third might offer tutorials on how to become a supplier to a bigger enterprise. It's a maze of crude and fairly standardized offerings with little dialogue between institutions. The biggest infrastructure capital spend in two generations—the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which will provide over \$1 trillion in investments over the next five years—offers an opportunity to change this scattered support system so that it finally centers the users and responds to their needs in ways that promote equity and creativity. Rather than enumerating outputs—how many people produced business plans or attended coaching sessions—a cohesive system would focus on meaningful outcomes, like growth in revenues, access to good jobs, and building wealth. Getting there will require city agencies to commit to specific targets, such as moving more women and minority-owned firms from sub to prime contractor status and growing the pipeline of entrants “behind” them. A new nationwide campaign and learning effort by infrastructure agencies, the Equity in Infrastructure Project, is showing how to increase shares of spend going to historically underutilized businesses. A demand-driven engine would elevate the institutions that demonstrate they can best deliver start-up and growth capital, technical assistance that's tailored to fit, and outcomes that matter, changing lives and lifting up communities.

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## **57. Use NYC government procurement to advance the economic interests of low-income communities**

Stanley Brezenoff, former NYC Deputy Mayor;  
former President and CEO, NYC Health+Hospitals

New York admirably spends billions on social services programs that care for the neediest residents and uplift people out of poverty, but the scale of the challenge is so immense—and the need to make additional progress so great—that bold new approaches are necessary. One opportunity is to make use of the city's massive procurement budget to create new well-paying jobs for the most vulnerable New Yorkers. For example, New York typically procures new ambulances from companies in Texas; instead, the city should use its considerable purchasing power to push for ambulance assembly to take place in Hunt's Point or another neighborhood in the five boroughs that would benefit from middle-income production jobs. Although the city will incur higher costs, the benefits of doing so—well-paying jobs for low-income New Yorkers—will be worth it, similar to how economic development projects involve upfront costs or subsidies. There are dozens of similar opportunities. For instance, city spending to repair elevators in NYCHA properties should go to companies that train and employ public housing residents to do this work, and NYCDOT paving projects should give priority to firms that employ city residents. The mayor should ask every city agency to identify opportunities to use their purchasing budget to advance the economic interests of low-income communities and require bidders on a range of projects to detail the share of their workforce that lives in the city.

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## **58. Use alternative criteria for business funding other than zip codes and census tracts**

Victoria Lee, Co-Founder and CEO, Welcome to Chinatown

Though Chinatown businesses were among the hardest hit by the pandemic, a significant number of them were unable to apply for city financial aid because of a quirk in the application process: they happened to be in a zip code or census tract that also includes Soho and Tribeca, raising the median income of businesses in their neighborhood and therefore disqualifying them. While many government aid programs for small businesses, including cash grants and zero interest loans, understandably require recipients to be located in low- to middle-income zip codes or census tracts, these restrictions have inadvertently deprived businesses that otherwise meet all the criteria for assistance. Many low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, like Chinatown, encompass multiple zip codes and census tracts and closely border affluent areas. As Jackson Heights, Williamsburg, and other neighborhoods continue to face rapid gentrification, an equitable economy will require more holistic fund allocation processes. The Department of Small Business Services and other city agencies should develop alternative criteria for aid eligibility to ensure, for example, that women-owned and minority-owned businesses within a certain radius of BID boundaries can still qualify. Regardless of zip code, businesses in Chinatown and across New York City need help keeping their doors open.

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## **59. Expand NYC’s Department of Consumer and Worker Protection to give higher-quality financial services to more New Yorkers**

Lisa Servon, Kevin and Erica Penn Presidential Professor of City and Regional Planning, UPenn Weitzman School of Design

Too many New Yorkers lack access to safe and affordable financial services, making it impossible to achieve the cornerstones of financial health—the ability to spend, save, borrow, and plan. Unfortunately, big banks are often more interested in making a profit than in serving those whose financial lives are precarious. That’s where government can step in. The city should do more to help the underserved communities banks typically ignore. The city’s Department of Consumer and Worker Protection already offers free financial counseling and SafeStart Accounts, which are inexpensive bank accounts that have no overdraft fees and a low minimum balance requirement. The banks that offer these accounts are not the “usual suspects”—the four largest banks that hold nearly half of all deposits in the country. SafeSmart banks such as Amalgamated, Carver, and Spring Bank, are smaller and tend to prioritize doing right by their customers. However, few New Yorkers know about these programs. These resources need to be expanded and made more visible. Further, many of the people who need these services most have grown to distrust banks because of their history of discrimination and because of bad experiences. The city has already partnered with banks to offer SafeStart Accounts. That’s an important first step. In order to leverage the potential of these programs, the city must partner with CBOs to rebuild trust and understand residents’ concerns from their perspectives. Building strong relationships between the city, low-income communities, and financial institutions will help more New Yorkers achieve financial health.

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## **60. Leverage entrepreneurship education to disrupt the cycle of poverty in public housing communities**

**J.D. LaRock, President and CEO, Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship**

Youth and young adults deeply impacted by systemic inequities are untapped resources for building and leading future businesses across New York City. Providing free entrepreneurship programs to young people ages 13 to 24 currently living in NYCHA communities would support economic empowerment through business creation—a powerful lever for addressing wealth disparities. Embedded workforce development programs in NYCHA communities already recognize that skills training and supportive bridges to work are a powerful pairing, and adding entrepreneurship education would elevate these efforts tremendously. Effective education, bolstered by the creation of a supportive community, could create pathways to success through access to capital, networking, and other foundations of business development. With individuals, corporations, and lending institutions joining the effort, a network of committed mentors could help young people overcome historic hurdles to business creation and take advantage of the vast opportunities New York City has to offer. A new generation of NYCHA entrepreneurs could build wealth for their families and their communities, eventually taking on employees, interns, and mentees of their own.

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## **61. Create and scale up entrepreneurship programs for Hispanic women**

**Myriam Rebling, Executive Director, Qualitas of Life Foundation**

Hispanic women have experienced disproportionate income losses due to the impact of the pandemic. Many worked in hospitality, cleaning, service, and other fields affected by the COVID-19 crisis, while others had to leave work to care for their children. Many of these women are turning to entrepreneurship as a means of economic opportunity and there is vast potential to help them. As new business owners, they face language, institutional, and technology barriers, as well as financial uncertainty, lack of confidence in financial institutions, and other challenges. The city should address these inequities with targeted support. The Department of Small Business Services already works with this population daily in partnership with many CBOs. They should create, strengthen, and scale up programs that connect Hispanic women entrepreneurs to business financial services, digital literacy courses, and Spanish-speaking coaches and mentors. The city should also provide grant funding, particularly for those who launched their businesses last year.

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## **62. Make it easier for MWBEs to become certified and win city contracts**

**Jill Johnson, Co-Founder and CEO, Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership**

New York City's Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE) program expands opportunities for minority and women entrepreneurs to access government contracts and grow their businesses. When eligible businesses become certified, they become more visible to prospective buyers as part of an online directory, and gain access to networking events and targeted consultations. The problem is that becoming certified is an arduous process that currently requires a laundry list of documentation: lease agreements or proof of ownership for every business location; completed and signed business contracts and invoices for all services performed by the business within the past year; proof for each owner claiming minority status; details regarding how the business was initially capitalized; and much more. As part of his administration's mission to reduce bureaucracy for community-based businesses, especially MWBEs, Mayor Adams should simplify the certification process and lead outreach to the thousands of small businesses that are still unregistered, whether because

they haven't had the bandwidth or necessary technology, or simply haven't been aware of the designation and its benefits. The mayor should then hold city agencies accountable for awarding more contracts to these businesses. Awarding city contracts to MWBEs will boost businessowners historically denied access to mainstream capital, foster a genuinely representative ecosystem of small and medium-sized businesses, and distribute wealth more equitably.

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### **63. Provide startup funds and technical assistance to cooperatives for undocumented domestic violence survivors**

**Nathaly Rubio-Torio, Executive Director, Voces Latinas**

During the height of the pandemic, when the majority of New Yorkers had to stay indoors, rates of domestic violence soared and undocumented domestic violence survivors were particularly vulnerable. Now, survivors who left their home situation—or are still looking to leave their home situation—are trying to find work, achieve financial security, and regain a sense of independence. The mayor and City Council can support these survivors by helping them launch businesses of their own. A small business cooperative-based program would provide training, mentoring, and seed-funding. The worker cooperative would partner with CBOs that specialize in business consultation as well as social work and legal services. This holistic approach would help survivors build entrepreneurial skills while they also work toward documentation and their own healing. In their home countries, many immigrant survivors were accountants, executive assistants, journalists, or other professionals, and have demonstrated their resourcefulness in coming to New York. An equitable economy is one in which these survivors have the opportunity to own their own businesses and lead healthy lives.

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### **64. Help home-based entrepreneurs become small business owners**

**Kevin Alexander, President and CEO, Rockaway Development Corporation**

Small businesses are the backbone of New York City's economy. Since the start of the pandemic and beyond, many New Yorkers have launched small businesses out of their homes, but often lack the technical expertise to turn their work into sustainable enterprises. The city should harness the energy of these entrepreneurs, particularly those living in public housing, and help them create more formal, profitable businesses. The city should direct funding through hyperlocal CBOs like the Rockaway Development Corporation, Queens Economic Development Corporation, and the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation. Rather than temporary, discretionary funding, it's critical for these businesses to receive sustained funding for at least three years. Some funding could also be used as incentives to complete business training programs. A program that culminates in a business plan competition, for example, might grant winners seed funding or a guaranteed forgivable loan. Such support would enable Black and brown entrepreneurs to hire employees and procure more goods and services within their communities. Lifting these small businesses up will lift up communities such as southeast Queens and the entire city.

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### **65. Teach every high school student financial literacy skills**

**Chymeka Olfonse, former Regional Executive Director, BUILD NYC**

Financial literacy is the foundation for economic mobility, yet we are failing to equip young people with the knowledge they need to save money, build credit, manage loans, and become savvy investors. Often, it's parents



that informally or indirectly teach their children these skills, which reinforces the class status quo. It's time to give all young New Yorkers an equitable financial education. New York City should advocate for the state legislature to pass Bill S5827B, which requires high school students to take a financial literacy class in order to graduate. Students should be taught financial literacy through project-based learning so they can apply what they have learned and see real-world concepts come to life. In partnership with CUNY, the city should also ensure educators have the training they need to effectively teach this essential material. In the next four years alone, New York City could launch more than 300,000 graduates into their adult lives ready to navigate student loans, raise capital for a new business, use credit cards, access scholarships and other life-changing subsidies, work toward a mortgage, and much more.

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## **66. Ensure that small businesses receive documentation on fines and regulations in multiple languages**

*Jo-Ann Yoo, Executive Director, Asian American Federation*

Asian-owned small businesses are vital to New York's economy, accounting for nearly a quarter of all businesses in the city. In recent months, they have also served as crucial anchors for the community amidst alarmingly frequent incidents of anti-Asian hate. But countless Asian-owned businesses are being hurt by the city's failure to translate important documents and offer interpreter services into multiple languages. For example, many Asian business owners have accrued outstanding tickets issued by city agencies that have failed to communicate why they are receiving the ticket in the relevant language. Without this communication, the fine compounds and the violation becomes a larger issue—a process that could easily be resolved by overcoming the language barrier. City leaders can help by finally enforcing the City Council's 2018 Language Access Law, which mandated that city documents would be issued in the 10 most common languages spoken by New Yorkers. Additionally, rules regulating small business operation should be offered in more than English, Spanish, and Mandarin. Thousands of business owners speak Korean and Vietnamese, for example, and would benefit greatly from city documents in these languages, too. The Department of Small Business Services (SBS) should support these efforts by providing orientation and training on the ground, explaining new laws and regulations to business owners in their primary language. Rather than using flawed Google translation services on the SBS website, city agencies should tap into the pool of the many New Yorkers with language expertise.

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## **67. Help more New Yorkers invest in the digital economy**

*Ramik Williams, Co-Executive Director, Kings Against Violence Initiative*

While the digital economy is still new and accessible, New York City should seize the opportunity to use it as a vehicle for equity and help more people invest. The Adams administration should launch a public-private partnership program to empower low-income, first-time investors curious about digital currencies. The program could provide educational resources on responsible investment strategies and—crucially—funds for participants to invest directly. Similar to cash assistance, this type of support would give New Yorkers the opportunity to generate wealth, transferring currencies like bitcoin or crypto into hard assets such as property or use their investments to start their own businesses. The city could raise funds for this program through public-private partnerships as well as bonds. In this way, the government could leverage corporate interest into human service interest and foster a far more diverse pool of investors, business owners and property-owners.

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## **68. Provide free financial and legal counsel to property owners in low-status communities**

Majora Carter, MacArthur Fellow; Urban Revitalization Strategist; Real Estate Developer; Author of *Reclaiming Your Community: You Don't Have To Move Out Of Your Community To Live In A Better One*

Low-Status Communities (LSC) are places where schools are worse, incarceration rates are higher, and health statistics are bad. They are also locations where individuals are led to believe that success is measured by how far they get away—unlike successful communities, which like successful companies, retain talent. What if we looked at LSC's as though they were struggling companies? How could we turn them around? A typical LSC is peppered with pharmacies, health-clinics, 99-cent stores, and fast food, or talent-repulsion development. In the absence of commercial lifestyle-infrastructure (quality cafes, bars, restaurants, farmers markets, book-stores) that increase social interaction, local talent migrates out. This leads to property liquidation because those with the acumen to leverage rapidly appreciating urban real estate don't value it emotionally and sell. In America, a public defender is assigned to those accused of crimes who can't afford a lawyer. The same should be done for local property owners. Before a six-figure real estate transaction goes forward within a LSC, the city should provide sellers with free legal and financial counsel, so they're aware of the long term value and how to sensibly refinance to do things like renovate rental units, build vertical additions, tap equity college tuition, or start businesses. These property owners could be classified by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as a protected class to help build Black and LSC wealth, and reduce fast, below-market, cash sales aggressively pursued by speculators that too often eviscerate wealth-building potential. Let's protect and create more dispersed ownership in our city.

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## **69. Accelerate the use of technology to build a more equitable city and prepare all New Yorkers to use it**

Michael Blake, CEO, Atlas Strategy Group; former NYS Assembly Member

The two-plus years of the pandemic has underscored the ever-expanding role of technology in people's everyday lives—and the enormous power of online tools to help individuals undertake routine task from their own home and enable businesses to reach new markets. But there's so much more technology can do to help address the enormous inequalities that still exist in communities of color across New York City. For example, the same way individuals now go online to search for and purchase last minute tickets for a basketball game, low-income New Yorkers should be able to find and access capital for their small business or identify the best affordable option for childcare. City officials should push for tech-based innovation that transform lives in low-income communities, create new opportunities for New Yorkers of color to get ahead, and empower minority-owned businesses. To do this, city officials could establish idea competitions that reward the best civic-tech innovations that disrupt the cycle of inequality. They could also leverage city agencies' contracting powers, by requesting proposals from startups that could deliver important new tech solutions for low-income communities. And city leaders could launch a citywide education campaign, to help ensure New Yorkers lacking in digital proficiency are able to take advantage of the new technology opportunities available to them.

# 5

**Expand childcare  
and other supports  
for working  
New Yorkers**

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## 70. Boost support for Family Child Care providers

Jaime-Jin Lewis, Founder and CEO, Wiggle Room

Family Child Care programs—small daycare businesses located in residential settings that typically accommodate groups of 6 to 16 children—are the largest supply of childcare for children under three years old in New York City, especially among communities of color and low-income communities. Family Child Care offers tremendous benefits to New York’s children: they receive care in a small, social environment that is more likely to be culturally responsive, they’re less likely to be pushed into the school-to-prison pipeline, and more likely to receive integrated services if they need special accommodations. Yet these small businesses face massive barriers to operating successfully and sustainably, including high overhead costs, intense infrastructure demands, and extensive regulation and accompanying paperwork with little support. While the Mayor’s Child Care Blueprint will improve affordability and access for families, New York City needs a Family Child Care workforce to supply the care. It’s time to invest in this critical modality of childcare by allocating funding and ensuring it’s accessible to individuals who run small Family Child Care businesses. To do this, New York City should create a Family Child Care Advisory Committee comprised of providers and families to outline recommendations and liaise between the Administration and the 5,900 Family Child Care programs across the five boroughs.

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## 71. Enact new protections related to employees’ working time

Janet Gornick, Director, Stone Center of Socio-Economic Inequality;  
Professor of Political Science and Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center

Shift workers make up a significant part of New York City’s workforce and are essential to the retail, restaurant, hospitality, and home health industries, among others. The majority of these workers—cashiers, waitresses, baristas, nail technicians, and home health aides—are women, immigrants, and people of color. In addition to low wages, they often face inflexible erratic work schedules and shifts that are shortened or even canceled at the last-minute, decreasing their wages over time and making it extremely difficult to stay in school or arrange childcare. A working mother, for example, might hire a babysitter, pay bus fare, and commute for an hour only to arrive at work and find her shift canceled without pay. To prevent this from happening, New York City passed the Fair Workweek Law in 2018, which offers protections for fast food and certain retail workers, such as 14 days’ notice of their schedule and a paid premium for scheduling changes. The City Council should expand this legislation to provide more robust protections for all restaurant and retail workers, as well as other types of shift workers. All workers should have the right to 30 days’ notice of their schedule, the right to request scheduling changes—and have those requests legitimately reviewed—and the right to be paid in full for scheduled shifts that may be shortened or canceled. In an equitable economy, these basic rights would be guaranteed for all workers.

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## 72. Implement supportive workplace policies for all women at every stage of life

Anu Duggal, Founding Partner, Female Founders Fund

The pandemic created a crisis among working women: they lost their jobs at higher rates than men, and as daycare and school buildings shut down, many were forced to leave work in order to care for their families. But the pandemic has also forced employers to reconsider fundamental workplace policies, presenting an opportunity

to replace policies designed by and for men with ones that acknowledge the needs of women. To help women return to the workplace and excel there, New York City’s public and private employers should implement more inclusive, holistic systems of support. While adequate maternity leave and accessible childcare continue to be priorities, employer policies should accommodate all women, not just working mothers. A combination of leave policies, flexible hours, remote work, and telehealth services could help women navigate health challenges from period pain to morning sickness to menopausal insomnia. Such policies would also help women who are expected to do a considerable amount of caretaking—looking after an elderly parent, for example—alongside their jobs. In an inclusive economy, women should be able to succeed at every stage of their careers without compromising their own health or the health of their families.

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### **73. Partner with CBOs to provide free childcare to undocumented mothers**

**Yesenia Mata, Executive Director, La Colmena**

All parents do not have equitable access to childcare. The COVID-19 pandemic made this inequity more visible and exacerbated it further. While the state provided childcare aid, many immigrant children were excluded, forcing mothers—who work primarily as domestic workers and day laborers—to either work less or bring their children to work with them. In order to support these hardworking New Yorkers and ensure the safety of their children, the city should partner with CBOs to support undocumented mothers with childcare. Several CBOs have already developed successful models, having provided childcare services for free or for a discounted cost to undocumented families during the pandemic. The city should scale up these services so that they are available to all undocumented workers. With their children cared for, one of the most vulnerable populations in New York will be able to go to work, organize for their rights, and participate in a more equitable economy.

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### **74. Lobby state leaders to increase NYC's minimum wage so that it is truly a living wage**

**David Garza, President and CEO, Henry Street Settlement**

There are a number of policy steps city officials could take to expand economic opportunities for the most vulnerable New Yorkers, but none would have as big an impact for as many people as raising the minimum wage to a living wage. Recent research has shown that single adults living in New York City need to earn nearly \$22 an hour to meet their basic needs—and that analysis was done before the nearly unprecedented spike in inflation that has only made living in New York significantly more expensive. The current minimum wage of \$15 an hour is now wholly insufficient, leaving an alarming number of New Yorkers unable to afford basic needs like healthcare, food, transportation, and rent. Raising it to a level where the minimum wage is closer to a living wage would make a world of difference for New Yorkers trying to get ahead. And since tens of thousands of New Yorkers would have more money in their pockets, it would also stimulate the city’s economy and provide a lift to small businesses. City officials should lobby Albany leaders to make this important change.



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## **75. Enable more New Yorkers to access well-paying healthcare jobs by providing free childcare for those in training programs**

**Maria Castaneda, Senior Executive Vice President, 1199SEIU**

COVID-19 exposed longstanding racial disparities in public health. It also exacerbated staff shortages in the healthcare sector, sending hospitals, clinics, and home healthcare agencies scrambling to hire nurses, medical assistants, lab technicians, and more. New York City should seize the opportunity to train a new generation of healthcare workers who live in and understand the communities the hardest hit by the pandemic. In partnership with CUNY, public libraries, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, and employers, the city should provide free healthcare training and certification opportunities for New Yorkers from low-income backgrounds. They should also address the second biggest barrier for people entering the healthcare workforce: childcare. Far too many candidates are currently dissuaded from pursuing training by a lack of access to affordable, quality childcare. Coupling training with childcare would allow these workers to step onto a career ladder of union employment with family-sustaining wages and good benefits. Investing in a more diverse healthcare workforce will not only expand access to well-paying in-demand jobs, but also create a more representative healthcare system, building trust between providers and patients and improving health outcomes long term.

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## **76. Establish new financial relief for single mothers that don't qualify for existing public programs**

**Garnesha Ezediaro, Greenwood Initiative Lead, Bloomberg Philanthropies**

Underserved communities across New York City are home to thousands of single mothers who are working hard but not receiving the support needed to get ahead. In a city where the already-high cost of living has only skyrocketed in the past year, working mothers are often earning incomes that put them slightly over the threshold to qualify for subsidies. This lack of support takes moms off the path of economic mobility and makes it even harder for them to provide for their families. Many of New York's single mothers benefited greatly from the historic Child Tax Credit that was part of the federal government's American Rescue Plan. Indeed, research has shown that the tax credit was a big reason for the spike in the number of Black women starting their own business over the past year, a promising trend that could generate more wealth for Black families and help move towards racial wealth equity. But with this one-time lifeline no longer in effect, city leaders should develop its own mechanism to bring financial relief to single mothers, one of the most common household types in the city. This might include replicating programs that have proven successful in other places, from the Magnolia Mother's Trust in Jackson, MS to Oakland's Universal Basic Income program—or creating a new initiative aimed at narrowing New York's racial wealth divide. There's so much opportunity for New York to innovate around supporting single mothers. Doing so should be a key element of building a more equitable city.

# 6

## Strengthen NYC's **social safety net**

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## 77. Supplement the Empire State Tax Credit so that the poorest and youngest children benefit the most

Irwin Garfinkel, Mitchell I. Ginsberg Professor of Contemporary Urban Problems; Co-Founding Director, Columbia Population Research Center, Columbia School of Social Work

To build an equitable economic recovery, New York City should prioritize children by giving families cash assistance. The benefits of cash assistance are comparable to investments in children's education and healthcare, as research shows raising the incomes of low-income families leads to greater health, longevity, academic, and economic outcomes compared to children who do not receive aid. The state already distributes cash to children based on family income through the Empire State Tax Credit, but the city should go further. Currently, the tax credit only covers children between the ages of 4 and 17, leaving the youngest out, and the poorest families receive only \$100 per child every year while middle-income families receive about \$330. The city should supplement the state's tax credit by investing \$1 billion a year so that each child, including those younger than 4 and in every income bracket outlined by the state for the credit, should receive \$1,000 a year across the board. The expansion of the tax credit will benefit the youngest, poorest children the most, and the city as a whole: for every \$1 spent on the Empire State Tax Credit, there will be a return in the economy of roughly \$10, meaning a \$1 billion investment will yield \$9.8 billion.

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## 78. Provide universal basic income to young people aging out of the foster care system

Saroya Friedman-Gonzalez, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Children

Young people aging out of New York City's foster care system face daunting odds. Barely one in five has finished high school or earned a high school equivalency degree and only one in three has a verified source of income at the time they age out. Almost one-third of youth experiencing homelessness in New York have been in the foster care system and that number is likely even higher among the Black community. More support is needed to ensure that these young New Yorkers have the chance to establish stable, independent adult lives. A basic income together with mental health support, career development, and mentorship would provide a meaningful safety net, preventing youth from becoming homeless or incarcerated. Organizations like New Yorkers for Children, which provided cash assistance to former foster youth during the pandemic, have found that the funds were often spent on food, rent, and childcare. With enough cash assistance, former foster youth could begin to build assets for themselves, become self-sufficient, and break cycles of intergenerational poverty.

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## 79. Narrow the racial wealth gap with baby bonds

Gary Cunningham, President and CEO, Prosperity Now

Though a new baby's arrival seems like a time of infinite possibility, the unfortunate reality is that a child's future is largely already fixed by their family's financial situation. If that child's family has wealth, they will likely receive the financial support they need to earn a college degree and purchase their first home. If, on the other hand, a child's family has little or no wealth—which is disproportionately the case for Black and Latinx households—they are much less likely to become financially secure. The city of New York has the power to address this inequity by implementing a Baby Bond program. If, at birth, the government invested on behalf of children

born into low-income households, as adults recipients could invest those funds in assets that grow in value over time: a home, a small business, or postsecondary education. Baby Bond policies have been passed in Connecticut and Washington, DC, and a precedent already exists in New York City. Through the NYC Kids RISE Save for College Program, every kindergartner enrolled in a public school automatically receives a \$100 initial investment toward higher education. The city should build on the program's success, investing larger amounts for children in low-income households, allowing the funds to be used more flexibly, and ultimately helping more Black and Latinx New Yorkers build intergenerational wealth.

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## **80. Institute a minimum basic income for NYC residents earning below 250 percent of the federal poverty level**

*Dia Bryant, Executive Director, The Education Trust–New York*

In 2019, over 2 million New Yorkers, including 712,000 children, lived in poverty. New York children are more likely to live in poverty than in 32 other states, with nearly 1 in 5 experiencing poverty in 2019. The pandemic further widened the wealth gap while the costs of housing, healthcare, food, and other necessities continue to increase. To help arrest these alarming trends, New York City should institute a minimum basic income for residents earning below 250 percent of the federal poverty level, which is currently \$27,750 for a family comprised of two adults and two children. Doing so would provide a modicum of financial security for hundreds of thousands of low-income New Yorkers and change the trajectory of so many young people across the five boroughs. Mayor Adams should join the coalition of Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, advocating for an income floor at the federal and state levels, elevating the experiences of families living with economic insecurity, and testing pilots in communities who stand to benefit the most. In an equitable city, no child should live in poverty.

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## **81. Remove barriers to employment for people on public benefits with at least six months of earned income disregard**

*Katy Gaul-Stigge, President and CEO, Goodwill Industries of Greater New York and Northern New Jersey*

New Yorkers on public assistance understand that getting a job is an important step on the path out of poverty, but many who want to work are deterred from doing so by government rules that put them at risk of losing their benefits if they receive even a modest bump in income. Means-testing is part of the rules of benefit programs like SNAP, TANF and NYCHA housing and current rules provide disincentives for public assistance recipients transitioning into employment. In fact, people could lose benefits in as little as 30 days if their new job puts their income above allowable levels, which could happen within a single pay period. Not surprisingly, with small numbers of hours scheduled, unpredictable schedules that conflict with childcare (which might not be secure), or barriers to transportation, some new employees end up quitting their jobs. The city can change this by establishing at least six months of Earned Income Disregard (EID), a program that allows individuals to continue receiving government benefits for a period after starting a full- or part-time job. If the city could help more New Yorkers stabilize their lives and reach the milestone of 90 to 180 days of work, statistically those workers are far more likely to retain their jobs for the long run. By granting workers a longer runway before removing their benefits, the city could bulldoze barriers to employment and create a far more stable, equitable workforce.

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## **82. Enable more New Yorkers to access food benefits by expanding eligibility and centering user needs**

**Bill Cromie, CEO, HelpKitchen**

While there is enough food to feed the city's 8 million residents, many New Yorkers still go hungry because they are unable to access existing food benefits. One in five low-wage workers, for example, is food insecure but does not qualify for food stamps (SNAP) because of their employment. Someone who needs food should never be penalized for working multiple jobs—or being unable to fill out paperwork, answer an unscheduled call, or visit a charitable food space at a certain time. New York City should make food benefits more accessible by redesigning the eligibility requirements and application process. The Department of Social Services should provide application assistance in-person and via phone, allow applicants to schedule follow-up calls, and offer more customizable services such as flexible curbside pick-up and drop-off delivery. In an equitable city, everyone should have access to nutritious, dignified meals.

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## **83. Scale up the Service Design Studio and hire service designers across city agencies**

**Noel Hidalgo, Executive Director, BetaNYC**

New York City has worked hard to institutionalize the practice of gathering data and using it to make informed policy decisions, but many city agencies and CBOs offering critical services still aren't reaching or effectively serving New Yorkers in need. The next step in strengthening government services is to implement a well-resourced service design practice across agencies. Service design aims to holistically improve accessibility and simplify user experiences. Rather than expecting New Yorkers to identify and navigate the appropriate agency or program, service designers can help providers proactively connect with potential recipients who may not even know they are eligible. Service designers can also modernize application processes and streamline service delivery models. The Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunities has already launched a Service Design Studio which currently offers workshops and office hours for city employees. The Adams administration should scale the studio so that they have the capacity to coach teams across agencies and standardize government service design methods. Eventually, all relevant agencies should hire their own service designers to embed these methods into their day-to-day operations, delivering more responsive and impactful services to more New Yorkers.

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## **84. Collect feedback from residents before rolling out new city services**

**Simon Sylvester-Chaudhuri, Founder and Executive Director, CIV:LAB**

City agencies deliver a vast array of services to millions of New Yorkers, from food assistance to workforce development training to arts programming. These services could benefit tremendously from user feedback. With direct input from residents, city agencies could better design and implement more user-friendly, more accessible tools that reflect the needs of their target audience. The city should adopt a centralized, autonomous platform—such as the one used for Participatory Budgeting or the NYC Speaks survey—to allow a diverse pool of residents to engage directly with dozens of agencies. As the service tested requires, surveys could be supplemented with boots-on-the-ground engagement. Of course, once feedback is collected, an important piece of this civic engagement infrastructure will be incorporating it into policies and products. In an equitable city, everyone should have the opportunity to shape city services.



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## **85. Train social workers and other frontline staff to become “justice advocates,” providing free legal advice to low-income New Yorkers**

Rohan Pavuluri, CEO, Upsolve

New York City should train its social workers, patient advocates, clergy members, and frontline staff to provide free legal advice for routine legal needs that low-income New Yorkers face. There aren't close to enough pro bono or legal aid lawyers available to meet the needs of every New Yorker who needs help, whether the issue is consumer debt collection, family law, housing law, expungement of criminal records, or other areas of poverty law that are critical for helping families achieve economic mobility. New York City needs to expand the supply of legal help that's available to New Yorkers and can do so by training trusted community advocates. Mayor Adams should enlist CUNY Law School to offer modular training courses for specific high-need areas of the law, partnering with CBOs, libraries, and churches, to train these "justice advocates" on how to meet the legal needs of their communities.

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## **86. Build data bridges so that government agencies and human services organizations can more efficiently share data**

Ben Thomases, Executive Director, Queens Community House

It's never been more important to make New York City's social services ecosystem more efficient. Indeed, city resources for human services have failed to keep pace with the skyrocketing number of New Yorkers in need of supportive housing, mental health screenings, food assistance, digital literacy training, and more. Yet the organizations providing these critical services are forced to use their precious staff time manually entering information into redundant databases. Queens Community House, for example, tracks participant data using its own Salesforce based database and separately enters data into DFTA or DYCD's databases. To dramatically increase efficiency, the city should build data bridges, or API bridges, to make it easy and cost effective for providers to import and export data into and out of city systems. Rather than building one central data system that would cost billions of dollars, take years to implement, and inevitably fail to meet the needs of hundreds of different organizations, data bridges would allow providers to maintain their own systems based on their unique missions and needs. Implemented right, data bridges would enable communication between these systems, freeing nonprofit staff to focus their time on delivering high-quality services and saving millions of dollars.

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## **87. Streamline NYC's background check process for prospective employees**

Geoff Canada, President and Founder, Harlem Children's Zone;  
Jennifer Jones Austin, CEO and Executive Director,  
Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

The pandemic reminded us how crucial human services organizations are to the health of our city. As leaders chart the path for an equitable recovery for all, they should do everything in their power to support New York City's more than 35,000 nonprofits and 600,000 human service workers, the majority of whom are women and people of color. One action they can take immediately is to streamline the background check process for prospective human services employees, which is currently painfully drawn out. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, which processes comprehensive background checks for new staff employed in early childhood,

after-school, and summer programs, can take up to a full month just to schedule a fingerprinting appointment, and several more weeks or months to receive the results. These delays are forcing prospective employees to accept alternative positions, leave the field entirely, or remain unemployed for months at a time without a reliable source of income, while disrupting services that children and their families depend on. The city should establish a firm two-week timeframe for all participating agencies to complete background checks, implementing more efficient technology or hiring additional staff if necessary. A timely turnaround for background checks will help get un- and underemployed New Yorkers back to work, allow human services organizations to bring new workers on board, and ensure millions of New Yorkers can access critical services.

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## **88. Invest \$10 million in the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to grow the capacity of POC-led nonprofits**

**Frankie Miranda, President and CEO, Hispanic Federation**

For decades, nonprofits in communities of color have spearheaded the provision of community services from after-school arts education to emergency food relief to support for budding entrepreneurs. Their essential role was exemplified during the height of the pandemic as they stretched their capacities to meet soaring demands. But Black, Latino, and Asian-led nonprofits don't have the same resources as their white-led counterparts. The revenues of Black-led organizations, for example, are 24 percent smaller than revenues of white-led organizations, while their unrestricted net assets are 76 percent smaller. In order to level the playing field, the city should invest in a \$10 million multi-year contract with the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund, which helps POC-led nonprofits build capacity. Long-term support would enable the fund to provide more grants, training, and technical assistance to the nonprofits best positioned to meet the needs of their communities. With support launching fundraising campaigns, managing cash flow, recruiting volunteers, and more, these organizations can realize the most inclusive, robust vision of their services, whether it's equipping underserved youth with entrepreneurial skills or ensuring low-income neighborhoods have access to fresh produce.

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## **89. Provide tech support via 311 to help the many older New Yorkers who struggle to navigate the Internet, access telemedicine, and apply for benefits online**

**Christian González-Rivera, Director of Strategic Policy Initiatives, Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging**

Since the beginning of the pandemic, New Yorkers of all ages have seen their lives become more closely connected to the Internet—from communicating over Zoom and FaceTime and purchasing groceries online to making virtual appointments with doctors. But hundreds of thousands of older New Yorkers still struggle to navigate basic technology tools, a problem that negatively impacts their quality of life, impacts their ability to access critical services like telemedicine, and makes it difficult to get ahead. At a time when there are more than 1 million New Yorkers age 65 and over—an all-time high—city leaders should take steps to make sure that this large and growing population of older adults not only has Internet service at home, but is able to get help when they encounter difficulty using it. City officials can do so by making free tech support available to all New Yorkers simply by calling 311. Upon dialing 311, an operator could direct callers to a contracted, culturally competent organization prepared to assist in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Italian or French Creole. Speaking to a human being in real time, in one's first language, would help those most likely to feel alienated by technology. A digitally equitable, digitally literate city would be far less isolated, more connected, and ultimately healthier.

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## **90. Ensure pay equity and create growth opportunities for nonprofit workers of color**

**Darlene Williams, President and CEO, Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow**

The nonprofit workforce in New York City is incredibly diverse: 64 percent are women and 85 percent are people of color. But top-level leaders are disproportionately white. The city should work to address systemic barriers in the nonprofit sector and create opportunities for people of color to progress and assume leadership positions. Every nonprofit organization that receives government funding should seek to implement inclusive recruitment and demonstrate equal growth opportunities for all employees. The city should also conduct a pay equity survey to ensure nonprofit workers of color are earning as much as their white counterparts. In an equitable city, nonprofit leadership should reflect the diversity of New York.

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## **91. Boost NYC's most vulnerable nonprofits by making it easier for them to access common, multi-year grant applications**

**Matt Miszewski, CEO, Catchafire**

New York City nonprofits contribute over \$77.7 billion to the city's economy, yet 69 percent of these organizations have annual revenues of \$200,000 or less. With so little funding, nonprofits are at constant risk, a point the pandemic drove home: an estimated 5,000 of them folded in 2020. To ensure these organizations can continue delivering critical services to millions of New Yorkers, the city should help them access multi-year funding through common grant applications. Common applications cut through bureaucratic red tape and sustained grants mean nonprofits won't have to scramble for operational funding year after year. In addition, the city should connect more organizations to wraparound services such as pro bono marketing and free technical training in order to bolster their backend support. By providing more comprehensive, sustained support, the city can help its primary engines of equity—nonprofits—achieve their missions.

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## **92. Enact a recurring annual COLA for all human services workers**

**Judy Zangwill, Executive Director, Sunnyside Community Services**

Years of deferred, sporadic, and altogether insufficient cost of living adjustments (COLAs) mean that human services workers in New York City earn significantly less than their public and private sector counterparts, with two-thirds of human services workers hovering near the poverty line and one in five receiving food stamps. With inflation and the cost-of-living on the rise, as well as salaries in other sectors, many nonprofits are struggling to attract and retain workers with sustaining wages. To ensure the city has the workforce it needs to deliver critical services—from social workers to housing specialists to nutritionists—the mayor and city council should enact an annually recurring COLA for all human service workers. The FY2023 city budget includes \$60 million in workforce enhancement funds, which can be used to boost wages in the short-term. But organizations need to know they can count on regular funding increases in years ahead. Enacting a consistent COLA could, finally, stabilize the sector crucial to building a more equitable city long-term.

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### **93. Raise wages for municipal employees and workers at nonprofits that contract with the city**

Ana Oliveira, President and CEO, The New York Women's Foundation

It's bad enough that hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who have full time jobs earn too little to climb above poverty level. It's downright unacceptable that a large chunk of these working poor New Yorkers have jobs with city government or with nonprofit organizations that receive most of their funding from contracts with New York City. Changing this and making a bold commitment to paying a living wage to those working for city government and city-funded nonprofits is one of the most important things New York can do to significantly reduce poverty. Since most of these workers are women and people of color, requiring a living wage would also help close the racial wealth gap and create a more equitable economy. The first step is for Mayor Adams to declare his commitment to a living wage for all city employees, not unlike the previous mayor's announced intention to close Rikers Island correctional facility by a specific date. He would then work to make it a reality by engaging in negotiations with city unions about raising base level salaries in line with the cost of living. Next, the mayor should establish a commission that includes agency officials and nonprofit leaders to flesh out how to bring a living wage to nonprofit workers.

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### **94. Establish a minimum wage of \$22 an hour for social service workers**

Davon Russell, President, WHEDco

Social service workers are predominantly women and people of color and often are eligible for city benefits themselves. As first responders and essential workers, their work improves the lives of millions of New Yorkers, yet they themselves are not paid nearly enough to make ends meet. To survive in New York City, a \$15 minimum wage does not get you what you need. In order to keep social service workers employed and show them the respect they deserve, city leaders should implement a floor salary of \$22. Paying social service workers \$22 an hour, or nearly \$46,000 a year for full-time workers, is a meaningful way for the city to recognize their dedication and ensure they can continue to deliver critical services across all five boroughs.

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### **95. Cover the indirect costs of human services in perpetuity and ensure nonprofits are reimbursed on time**

Janelle Farris, President and Executive Director,  
Brooklyn Community Services

The city pays hundreds of nonprofit organizations to deliver essential human services, from mental health support to early literacy education to emergency food relief. But city funds typically only cover costs that are directly attributable to a particular service, leaving already financially vulnerable organizations scrambling to cover so-called "indirect" costs such as staff training, HR, financial support, and other general operations. After a dedicated advocacy campaign across the human services sector, New York City launched the Indirect Cost Rate Funding Initiative in 2019, and in 2021, the city recommitted \$120 million to the initiative over two years. But nonprofits have seen extreme delays in receiving reimbursement through the initiative; many are still waiting to be reimbursed for costs incurred in 2021 and even 2020. First, Mayor Adams and other city leaders should ensure these organizations can access existing funding in a timely manner as part of the regular vouchering process. Second, they should build indirect cost funding into the budget in perpetuity.

Dependable funding would help hundreds of struggling nonprofits to keep their doors open and stabilize New York City's human services sector long-term, benefiting not only their workers—predominantly women and people of color—but also the millions of New Yorkers they serve.

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## **96. Fund a 24/7 arrest support hotline to guarantee Early Legal Representation for arrested New Yorkers**

*Jelani Anglin, Co-Founder and CEO, Good Call NYC*

Over 300,000 New Yorkers are arrested annually with a majority of arrests occurring in 14 precincts of color across the city. All New Yorkers who interact with the justice system, regardless of whether or not they are ultimately convicted of a crime, are forever affected. An unexpected arrest can lead to job termination, eviction, and even loss of custody of children. Disproportionate arrest rates in communities of color directly correlate to higher unemployment numbers and a larger low-income population. The 24/7 arrest support hotline, Good Call, could protect New Yorkers from this slippery slope. With immediate access to a licensed attorney prior to the arraignment process, fewer people would face the lifelong social and economic consequences of wrongful charges. City leaders should make this resource readily available for all New Yorkers, especially those living in precincts with high rates of arrests. The Good Call hotline number could become as commonly known as 311. In order to empower communities of color and prevent disproportionate economic instability, the city should ensure every New Yorker has access to Early Legal Representation.

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## **97. Forge more nimble partnerships between city agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic foundations**

*Laura Jean Watters, Executive Director, The Staten Island Foundation*

New York City is home to hundreds of philanthropic organizations—a valuable asset underutilized by city government. For example, when a service provider wanted to expand their afterschool programming in Stapleton to meet demand, with the Staten Island Foundation poised to support the expansion, the provider's contract with DYCD limited the number of students they were permitted to serve. Similarly, many nonprofits have long waitlists for their services, but their contracts with city agencies disincentivize them from sharing the lists with similar organizations and the foundations eager to fund them. The city should forge more nimble, flexible partnerships with philanthropic organizations in order to provide services at scale. Public-private partnerships have the potential to grow effective programs so they finally match demand, addressing inequities for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

# 7

Invest in programs  
that **make the most  
vulnerable New  
Yorkers healthier**



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## **98. Expand mobile health units to bring access to primary care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers**

Melanie Hartzog, President and CEO, The New York Foundling;  
former NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services

A critical step on the path to building a more equitable New York is making communities healthier. For too long, the most vulnerable New Yorkers have lacked equitable access to preventative healthcare, a problem that has led to alarming rates of chronic disease, lower life spans, and, most recently, disproportionate impacts from COVID-19. To greatly expand access to preventative care and close these glaring health gaps, the Adams administration should expand a program started during the pandemic in which mobile health teams were regularly dispatched to places where vulnerable New Yorkers congregate—such as street corners where open air drug use takes place. The Joint Operations proved to be highly successful in delivering a host of primary care services, including over 5,000 vaccines administered, over 9,000 medical consultations that included wound care and mental health assessments, roughly 1,000 Narcan kits administered, as well as options to be driven to a needle exchange program or to a shelter or safe haven. The initiative hit on a successful way to reach the hardest to serve New Yorkers, but so far it has only been rolled out to a small handful of neighborhoods. It's time to expand the program and bring preventative care to far more New Yorkers. In addition to sending mobile units to more communities, the city might hire canvassers who would knock on doors in NYCHA and other low-income communities and offer direct care.

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## **99. Provide doula support to all New Yorkers giving birth in public hospitals and partner with CUNY to train this workforce**

Toya Williford, Executive Director, AC & JC Foundation;  
former Executive Director, Mayor's Fund to Advance NYC

Black women in New York City are eight times more likely than white women to die from pregnancy related causes, and babies born to Black and Puerto Rican mothers are three times more likely than white babies to die in their first year of life. City leaders should address these stark health disparities by expanding access to doula support. Doulas connect pregnant women with trusted information about prenatal nutrition, advocate for them in the delivery room, help them with nursing and other post-partum hurdles, and much more. Their support before, during, and after birth leads to less complications and better pain management for mothers, as well as fewer preterm and low-birthweight babies. While New York launched a Citywide Doula Initiative, no-cost doula service is currently only available in a small number of zip codes. Likewise, while NYC Health + Hospitals recently launched the HoPe Program (Helping Promote Birth Equity through Community-Based Doula Care), it's currently only available at Elmhurst and Queens Hospitals. City leaders should ensure that every New Yorker giving birth at a public hospital has access to doula support. The first step is increasing the number of trained doulas by creating a CUNY certification program; the second is creating well-paid, on-call doula positions at every public hospital in the city. Doing this would give newborns a strong start and help New York achieve more equitable health outcomes.

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## **100. Create an NYC Health Service Corps that embeds trusted community health workers within healthcare institutions**

Tom Frieden, President and CEO, Resolve to Save Lives; former Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; former Commissioner, NYC Health Department

In New York City and across the country, the COVID pandemic exposed glaring health disparities and further exacerbated them. Black and Hispanic New Yorkers have been more likely to die from COVID than their white counterparts, a combination of more exposure, more pre-existing health conditions such as asthma to diabetes, and less access to prevention and treatment. To protect these New Yorkers from the inevitable future threats of infectious disease and improve health more broadly, city leaders should take aggressive steps to improve the overall health of New Yorkers, particularly in communities with disproportionately high rates of chronic health conditions. To do this, the Adams Administration should create a Health Service Corps of community health staff who are embedded within primary healthcare institutions including the Health+Hospitals facilities, community clinics, and even private medical practices in low-income areas. Members of the Health Service Corps would help their colleagues identify and meet the needs of their communities. Already trusted by their communities, these advocates would coordinate linguistically and culturally attuned outreach, screenings, and increase continuity of care to combat hypertension, diabetes, asthma, obesity, cancer, HIV, and hepatitis C, as well as influenza, pneumonia, and COVID. With state and federal funding from Medicaid, Medicare, insurer mandates, and Federally Qualified Health Centers, the Health Service Corps would provide stable jobs and living wages in areas with high rates of unemployment, help New York City deliver more equitable healthcare, increase health and productivity, and reduce healthcare expenditures in the future.

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## **101. Fund community health improvement plans for the ten NYC neighborhoods facing the steepest inequities**

Sharon Greenberger, President and CEO, YMCA of Greater New York

Even before COVID-19, many New Yorkers were struggling with staggering health inequities due to expansive food deserts, lack of open space, and limited access to recreational facilities and high-quality, affordable, culturally competent healthcare. These challenges will only become more acute in the years to come, especially given the lack of coordination and communication amongst healthcare providers. To address this crisis, New York City needs a focused and coordinated strategy for improving community health in every borough. The city should create a well-funded Healthy Communities RFP focused on the ten neighborhoods currently facing the greatest health challenges, including Central and East Harlem, Brownsville, and Jamaica. City funding would facilitate the creation of advisory groups charged with drafting Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs) for their designated communities, and targeted community investment to implement the plans. Partners would include local CBOs, healthcare systems, libraries, schools, community leaders, and an academic institution to track, monitor, and evaluate the programs. To ensure an equitable recovery for all New Yorkers, the city needs to strengthen the health of its most vulnerable communities for the long run.

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## **102. Provide basic home repairs to improve health outcomes**

Kassa Belay, Executive Director, The Brownsville Partnership

Homeowners and tenants in low-income communities of color are far more likely to live in buildings with interrupted heating, electrical issues, outdated plumbing fixtures, lead paint, and mold—states of disrepair that

lead to poor health outcomes for residents. In Brownsville, emergency room visits related to asthma are more than double the citywide average for 5- to 17-year-olds. The city could dramatically improve community health by implementing a home repair program based on the Australian Health Habitats model, which has demonstrated a 40 percent reduction in hospital admissions in impacted communities, and its local adaptation, Community Action for Healthy Homes, currently offered in Brownsville. NYCHA or the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (DHPD) scale this model by offering in-home surveys to landlords and homeowners, and partnering with local WMBE vendors to perform basic repairs. Such a program has the potential to ease the burden on our healthcare system, bolster small WMBE home repair businesses, and preserve affordable housing stock in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods with high foreclosure rates and significant resident displacement. Above all, it could give more New Yorkers access to safe homes and improve their health long-term.

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### **103. Remove law enforcement from mental health crisis response**

**Cal Hedigan, CEO, Community Access**

Nineteen New Yorkers experiencing a mental health crisis have been killed in police encounters since 2015 alone. The city needs to build a mental health crisis response system as part of its healthcare system entirely separate from law enforcement. Correct Crisis Intervention Today (CCIT-NYC) calls for deploying teams made up of one emergency medical technician (EMT) and one peer, a person with lived mental health experience trained in de-escalation. These first responders should be dispatched via 988, the new national number for mental health emergencies, which should be as widely known as 911. Shifting the more than 200,000 mental health calls the police department receives each year to a peer-driven system would leverage resources far more effectively and provide a sorely needed public health response to a public health crisis. The approach proposed by CCIT-NYC stands in contrast to the existing City pilot program, Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division (B-HEARD). B-HEARD has no requirement for peers to be part of the teams, is embedded in the 911 system, and operates only 16 hours a day in a limited number of precincts. After six months in operation, only 22 percent of calls have been routed to the B-HEARD teams, and of those, only 82 percent were responded to by the teams. New Yorkers urgently need a true non-police response. A peer-driven mental health crisis response will save lives.

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### **104. Invest in worker- and community-led innovation to improve indoor air quality for frontline workers and low-income residents**

**Michael Partis, Executive Director, Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative**

The pandemic forced New York to reckon with its poor indoor air quality, especially for frontline workers and low-income housing residents facing pest, mold, and other issues. An equitable city is one in which all New Yorkers work and live in safe, healthy conditions. In order to improve indoor air quality across the city, the mayor should invest in worker- and community- led innovation and technology in advanced manufacturing. A Center for Advanced Manufacturing in every borough would empower communities to develop air quality solutions. In partnership with CBOs and CUNY, the hubs could offer certification courses and programs for workers and small businesses to build prototypes. A citywide participatory design body—comprised of tenant organizers and industry leaders in air quality—could make recommendations for city leadership and small businesses. The three industries that should lead the way are HVAC installation, pest management, and cleaning, as these workers already have on-the-ground knowledge about improving air quality, and at least 75 percent of the body should represent local MWBEs. In this strategy, economic democracy looks like workers and communities cooperatively designing, owning, and stewarding the enterprises and innovation that will improve working and living conditions for the long run, and better equip New York for other major crises moving forward.

# 8

Make NYC a  
more **affordable**  
**place to live**

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## **105. Provide comprehensive housing support for youth exiting foster care, including dedicated housing specialists at CBOs**

Michelle Yanche, Executive Director, Good Shepherd Services

Young New Yorkers transitioning out of foster care need access to affordable, stable housing. Without a home, it's impossible for them to take full advantage of workforce training or other economic mobility programs, sucking them further into systems of poverty. Receiving preference for NYCHA public housing should be the bare minimum. In addition, the city should allocate entire buildings and large blocks of apartments to supportive youth housing. It should provide adult foster youth with housing vouchers as well as programs to help them navigate the overwhelmingly complex system of housing in New York. The city should direct funding to CBOs that serve adult foster youth, so that they can have dedicated housing specialists on staff and assist youth transitioning into independent housing with their first month's rent as well as furniture. Currently, organizations like Good Shepherd Services, who see the scale and urgency of this need, privately fundraise to cover such costs. If, instead, the city institutionalized housing support for New York's most vulnerable young people, many of them would be spared from stubborn cycles of mass incarceration, homelessness, and poverty—all symptoms of a deeply inequitable society.

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## **106. Reform land use laws to make it easier to convert commercial buildings into affordable housing**

Ingrid Gould Ellen, Faculty Director, Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy; Paulette Goddard Professor of Urban Policy and Planning, NYU Wagner

COVID-19 created an acute need for temporary housing, as well as a market opportunity to repurpose under-utilized buildings that could more equitably house homeless and low-income New Yorkers. But thus far few offices and hotels have been converted to housing due in part to inflexible land use laws. The city should reform these laws by reducing the distinction between short and long-term residential uses; creating easier pathways to regulatory compliance after conversion; rethinking the places where the zoning code clings to an overly strict separation of uses; and defining when emergent conditions dictate modifying normal land use review. Paired with subsidies and incentives, such reform could boost New York City's housing stock by 75,000 units, and ensure that more low-income New Yorkers have access to stable homes. It would also prepare the city to pivot far more quickly in the face of the next emergency.

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## **107. Rezone low-rise commercial corridors in middle-income neighborhoods to spur more affordable housing and greater diversity**

Marc Jahr, Senior Advisor, Forsyth Street Advisors; former President, NYC Housing Development Corporation

Building a more equitable city will require new policies to tackle the city's affordable housing shortage. Building on past efforts, one strategy that can help unlock much more housing is to rezone commercial corridors for increased housing density in middle-income neighborhoods that have seen relatively little new housing added in recent years, and where local demand can support a mix of market-rate and deeply affordable units.

Examples include Northern Boulevard in Queens, Coney Island Avenue, and Flatbush Avenue in central and southern Brooklyn, and many other areas with low-rise commercial districts topped with a small number of existing residential units. To earn broad-based community support, these initiatives should be coupled with investments in addressing existing residents' legitimate concerns, including school crowding, limited green space, limited bus service, and congested subway stations, and local hiring preferences for construction jobs. The city should also be prepared to enforce fair housing laws, ensuring that new housing units are accessible to all New Yorkers. By focusing on the high-opportunity, middle-income neighborhoods that have seen little residential rental development, city leaders can help to maximize the amount of new housing coming online and lay the foundation for more socioeconomically diverse communities in the future.

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## **108. Approach housing as a human right and provide housing vouchers for all who qualify**

**Beatriz de la Torre, Managing Director of Housing and Homelessness,  
Trinity Church Wall Street**

One of the starkest inequities in New York City is between those who have homes and those who are homeless. Every night, 50,000 New Yorkers—the vast majority of whom are Black and Latinx—are homeless, and that number will grow as rents continue to rise. The homelessness crisis has been going on for far too long, and it's time the city take a different approach. While New Yorker's right to shelter should not be revoked, the city should move toward a framework that centers housing as a human right. All households that are income-eligible should receive a housing voucher that covers a portion of their rent, and the voucher system should be simplified so that recipients can quickly and easily find a decent place to live. New York City currently spends over \$2 billion in homeless shelters. Shifting a significant portion of that funding towards housing vouchers will ensure all New Yorkers have access to long-term, affordable homes.

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## **109. Launch a pilot program to transfer a NYCHA development into a Community Land Trust to be owned in perpetuity by the tenants**

**Melissa Mark-Viverito, former Speaker, New York City Council**

To help address New York's growing wealth gap and increase economic stability in communities of color, New York City should launch a pilot program to transfer an existing NYCHA development into a Community Land Trust owned by the tenants. New York City already has a workable land trust model, where residents are able to build equity over time through shared ownership while maintaining long-term housing affordability. City leaders can take this model to the next level by applying it to a NYCHA development—a system that's currently the cornerstone of affordable housing in New York, but one in which tenants often feel disempowered, all while spending a significant portion of their income on rent. To be successful, this pilot program would have to start with a commitment from the city, state, and federal government to get the building up to a state of good repair. The second phase would involve transferring ownership to a trust composed of the residents, with ample technical assistance to help residents run the property. By helping tenants to become stakeholders in their own housing, New York City can enable public housing residents to start building community wealth.



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## **110. Update underutilized housing programs to preserve and maintain more affordable housing**

Rafael E. Cestero, CEO, The Community Preservation Corporation

Roughly 40 percent of New York City’s rental housing is in small buildings under 50 units. Typically older and home to lower-income renters, they often operate on thin margins with little room for error. Changes to rent regulations greatly restricted the ability of many small owners to raise rents to pay for repairs and upgrades. Soon, some will need to comply with Local Law 97 (LL97) carbon reduction mandates or face steep fines. To ensure that these owners are able to preserve quality and affordability for their tenants, the city should provide programs that reduce operating and capital costs so small building owners can invest in upkeep. In the 1970s and '80s, the J-51 tax abatement and 8A loan program filled those roles, helping preserve thousands of units of housing. They could be effective tools today with common sense reforms. J-51 offers a property tax exemption and reduction based on the value of rehab work, but hasn’t kept pace with the actual costs of rehab, and the program is now virtually unused. It’s time to modernize its reimbursement schedule to reflect the reality of today’s market, add an adjustment period to keep pace with rising costs, and include an option to incentivize sustainability retrofits that meet LL97 requirements. The 8A loan program offers the right amount of subsidy, but in return asks for heavy regulatory agreements and complex marketing and reporting obligations. A streamlined program that had a light-touch regulatory agreement, and which worked in tandem with a new J-51, would make both programs powerful resources for preserving the city’s rental housing.

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## **111. Enact comprehensive zoning reform to build the housing that can make NYC significantly more affordable**

Jason Furman, Aetna Professor of the Practice of Economic Policy, Harvard University; former Chairman, President Barack Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers

There are a number of public investments that will make New York more attractive, but if you don’t build more housing those investments will mainly benefit individuals who already own property and make it more expensive for everyone else. That’s why any meaningful effort to create a more equitable economy in New York should include policies that make it more affordable to live in the city. The place to start is with zoning reform, one of the most powerful municipal policies to significantly increase the supply of housing and lower living costs—and one of the policy levers that’s within the city’s control. The priority should be a series of specific changes to zoning law that enable a lot more residential construction than what has been built in recent years. For instance, the city should consider eliminating parking restrictions that reduce the amount of housing that’s built, enable any hotel to be converted to residential use, reduce height restrictions on residential development, and make it so that no area of the city is off limits to housing. These steps should be coupled with other housing policies, including new resources for public housing. But meaningful zoning reform is crucial to increasing residential development, lowering housing prices, and ensuring that New York remains a place where those with modest incomes can survive and get ahead.

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## **112. Build 600,000 units of housing to meet the needs of New Yorkers today and change the rules to allow for a wider range of housing types in the future**

Eric S. Lee, Founder and Chair, Bennett Midland

The population of New York City exploded from 7 million in 1980 to 8.8 million in 2020, but the construction of new housing has not even begun to keep pace. The resulting housing shortage has led to staggeringly high costs, a burden disproportionately carried by low-income New Yorkers, young people, and those who have recently arrived in the city. In order to provide affordable housing to all New Yorkers, city leaders should set a target to build 600,000 new residential units. This ambitious residential development goal should be accompanied by bold rules changes that allow the city to succeed where previous housing efforts have fallen short. For example, the city should revise zoning regulations to accommodate higher density, so that new developments are no longer designed according to the scale of a bygone era, when the city was smaller and the car was a viable mode of transportation. It will also mean experimenting with a much wider range of housing types and investing in transit to make certain neighborhoods more accessible. Building substantially more—and more flexible—housing in every borough will change the face of New York, making every neighborhood more affordable, more accessible, and more diverse.

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## **113. Legalize Single Room Occupancy housing to provide affordable housing**

Muzzy Rosenblatt, CEO and President, Bowery Residents Committee

In New York City, over 500,000 households spend more than half their income on rent. Residents could otherwise put this money into the economy or toward their education and professional development. A solution to the affordable housing crisis is to legalize single room occupancy or SRO housing and provide funding to nonprofits to develop and maintain SROs in a modern, clean, and safe way. Single room occupancy housing is dorm-style: residents have private bedrooms and share amenities such as bathrooms and kitchens. As this type of housing requires less unit-by-unit infrastructure, it costs less to develop, and since each unit is smaller than an apartment with private amenities, many more units can be built per building. This style of living would simultaneously decrease rent costs and add affordable housing to the market. It would also aid homeless individuals transitioning out of the shelter system. The SROs that existed in the latter part of the 20th century were mainly managed by private landlords, a big reason why so many of these units fell into disrepair or were converted into market-rate housing. To ensure this doesn't happen again, nonprofits should help establish regulations, including inspection timelines. With revised building codes and improved maintenance, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers could have secure housing and far more money to invest in their futures.

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## **114. Help faith-based institutions with pre-development funding to convert underused real estate or sell air rights, enabling more affordable housing and community spaces**

Joyce Moy, Executive Director, Asian American/Asian Research Institute, CUNY

Faith-based institutions anchor communities across all five boroughs and are often the only real estate owned by the community. In rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods, many struggle to keep up with the cost of building maintenance and are at risk of being pushed out altogether. Communities should be empowered to leverage

this valuable asset to better meet their needs, whether it's converting an underutilized space for more flexible community and commercial use or selling air rights to develop ten stories of affordable housing above a ground-floor house of worship. To understand the many possibilities for redevelopment, faith-based institutions should have funding available to consult with land-use experts, lawyers, architects, engineers, and more. With technical insight and support, faith leaders could fully understand the hurdles and benefits of different options and create new models of development consistent with their missions. Bolstered by community space, thriving small businesses, and desperately needed housing, intact faith-based institutions can continue to provide community for thousands of New Yorkers.

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## **115. Invest \$4 billion to build affordable housing for NYC's older adults**

Allison Nickerson, Executive Director, LiveOn NY

In addition to promoting equity and opportunity for New Yorkers in the early stages of life, the city must reckon with the reality that many older New Yorkers are aging into poverty as a result of cumulative inequities experienced over the course of their lives. More than half of New Yorkers aged 65 and above are rent burdened, meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their pre-tax income on rent. Without intervention, the older adult population living in shelter is expected to triple by 2030. To address these inequities, the city should commit \$4 billion in capital investment to build affordable senior housing with a target of constructing 1,000 new units per year. The investment should prioritize the needs of NYCHA, as decades of underinvestment has left tens of thousands of older adults in deteriorating public housing conditions. An equitable city is one in which everyone, regardless of age, has an affordable, dignified place to live.

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## **116. Develop new programs that help homeowners of color retain their homes**

Valerie White, Senior Executive Director, LISC New York

Homeownership, the gateway to intergenerational wealth, has declined by 13 percent for Black New Yorkers over the last two decades. In many historically Black-owned and rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods, home prices have continued to soar. In Bed-Stuy, the median home sale price increased by 29 percent in 2021, the same year 179 properties in the neighborhood filed for foreclosure. City government should take action to help New Yorkers of color retain their homes by providing emergency maintenance grants and free technical assistance on refinancing options and addressing tax liens. The city should also help first-generation homebuyers with credit and mortgage coaching as well as down payment and closing cost grants. There has been meaningful progress in this direction: since the HomeFirst Down Payment Assistance Program launched in 2004, it's helped 3,000 families of color purchase homes, while partnerships with nonprofits like the New York Mortgage Coalition offer access to housing counseling agencies and lenders. But these resources are currently scattered, often labor-intensive to access, and underpublicized. A cohesive network of support should be created—a one-stop shop where both first-time buyers and long-time homeowners can go to seek trusted information, guidance, and grants. This network could be widely marketed to New Yorkers of color, so they know they're not alone in navigating a system that's all too often stacked against them. LISC NYC stands ready to lead that effort.

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## **117. Empower NYCHA residents to lead the reinvestment and rehabilitation of NYC’s public housing**

David Jones, President and CEO, Community Service Society of New York

Most NYCHA residents live in long-neglected buildings in dire need of updates and repairs. At the same time, NYCHA’s unemployment rate, per the 2017 Housing and Vacancy Survey, has remained relatively consistent at 24 percent—nearly three times as high as the city’s unemployment rate. New York City should create economic opportunity and lower unemployment amongst residents by empowering them to participate in efforts to rehabilitate NYCHA public housing. First, the city should convene a working group of public housing residents, NYCHA leadership, key elected and appointed public officials, and housing resource organizations to ensure residents exercise decision-making powers in the conversion process, access growing job and training opportunities, and play a meaningful role in property management once conversion takes place. Major renovations would not only improve living conditions for residents, but also generate jobs and training opportunities for them through HUD’s Section 3 requirements.

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## **118. End family homelessness by prioritizing preventative services, supporting the well-being of current shelter residents, and easing the transition into permanent housing**

Jennifer March, Executive Director, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York; Co-Convener, Family Homelessness Coalition

While street homelessness is the most visible form of homelessness in New York City, family homelessness is the most prominent. Black and Latina female-headed families with children make up more than 95 percent of all family shelter residents in New York, with over 14,000 children calling shelter home every day. The COVID-19 pandemic further deepened the racial, class, and gender disparities that drive these families into shelter in the first place, with widespread job loss and households unable to meet rent. If city leaders want to build a more equitable New York, they should prevent family homelessness by prioritizing government-subsidized housing vouchers and emergency rental assistance. Second, they should support the well-being of those currently living in shelters by providing access to trauma-informed counseling, employment training, childcare, youth services, and educational support. Third, they should expand access to permanent affordable housing and ease the transition with wraparound medical, educational, and social support to decrease risk of shelter re-entry. A holistic approach has the potential to finally end family homelessness and dramatically improve the health, education, and economic outcomes for tens of thousands of New Yorkers.

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## **119. Disrupt the NYC housing market to create more affordable housing**

Nicole Branca, Executive Director, New Destiny Housing

New York won’t be able to build a more equitable economy unless it can greatly increase the supply of affordable housing. After all, it’s impossible to find or keep a job if you don’t have a home, which is the tragic reality for the estimated 78,000 New Yorkers who are homeless on any given night. And for the half a million New Yorkers who do have homes but spend more than half their income on rent, it’s impossible to save money and climb out of poverty. Despite this chronic shortage of affordable apartments, the city has not created anywhere near enough housing to meet the demand. We need a multi-pronged approach to disrupt the housing market and

create new units on the scale that's desperately needed. This includes an infusion of capital funding—for both new construction and preservation—but also new policies and programs that encourage nonprofits to purchase existing buildings and convert them into affordable housing. Accessory dwelling units should be legalized while targeted regulatory relief could pave the way for converting hotels and other under-used properties into housing. Strategic use of master leasing could also prevent the market from skewing further. Additionally, expanded aftercare, housing navigation services and increased emergency funding, coupled with streamlined Section 8 processes and inspections, would significantly open up access to private sector apartments. If the city takes comprehensive action now, it could leverage the recent surge in rent subsidies and other financial support, and make New York a more just city for all.

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## **120. Prioritize homeownership as part of NYC's affordable housing strategy**

Jeremy Kohomban, President and CEO, The Children's Village

Homeownership, the largest source of intergenerational wealth, is highly inequitable in New York City. While 42 percent of white New Yorkers own their homes, the same is true for only 28 percent of Black New Yorkers and 16 percent of Hispanic New Yorkers. Affordable housing policy has continued to focus on the production and maintenance of rental units, which are frequently located in deteriorating buildings owned by negligent landlords where tenants face black mold, heating outages, and other hazards to their health and safety. City leaders should focus instead on empowering more New Yorkers to become homeowners. Expanded access to homeownership would create wealth for New Yorkers of color as well as better-maintained, safer, healthier neighborhoods. Rather than owning and operating supportive housing units for perpetuity, nonprofits like The Children's Village could pilot homeownership models for young adults who grew up in foster care or experienced the juvenile justice system. New Yorkers do not want to remain clients of the government and charities forever. Homeownership would allow them to achieve independence and build wealth for the next generation.

# 9

**Make NYC's  
communities  
greener, cleaner,  
and more just by  
investing in  
infrastructure  
and open space**



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## **121. Hire local environmental stewards to keep low-income neighborhoods free of trash and pollution**

Janet Rodriguez, Founder and CEO, SoHarlem

The few green spaces in Harlem are littered with trash, needles, and condoms. To improve quality of life for New Yorkers living in low-income neighborhoods, the city should hire local environmental stewards. These stewards could work with the Department of Sanitation, the Parks Department, and local nonprofits like WEACT to assess and advocate for the needs of their communities. The city could also fund a local workforce to water greenery, sweep pedestrian areas, effectively address pest infestations, and provide other services currently only available in Business Improvement Districts. In an equitable city, all New Yorkers should live in clean, green neighborhoods.

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## **122. Invest in climate-related workforce development programs in environmental justice communities—funded with a stormwater fee**

Maggie Greenfield, Executive Director, Bronx River Alliance

There is no issue of greater importance to New York City's future than adapting to our changing climate. City leaders are already taking aggressive steps to protect communities from storms, extreme heat, and sea level rise. Yet there is an opportunity to do more. The city should link its adaptation efforts with workforce development in the BIPOC communities most harmed by environmental injustice. How to fund such a program? With a stormwater fee. This fee would also incentivize water retention on private property to reduce catastrophic flooding in neighborhoods and sewage overflows into local waterways. Philadelphia and hundreds of other cities have already established stormwater fees which charge property owners based on the amount of water discharged into their overburdened sewer systems. (A tiered fee structure can be crafted to avoid overburdening low-income property owners.) Property owners who introduce water-capturing green elements—trees, rain gardens, rain barrels, green roofs, porous pavement—pay a lower fee. While reducing sewage in NYC's waterways would by itself be an important outcome, the funds created from the fee could be linked to righting harms in BIPOC communities. One model is Philadelphia's PowerCorps. The program supports job training in green fields rooted in community-based workforce development; government agencies also hire the program's graduates and create ladders for them to advance in their careers.

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## **123. Add a planner and an architect to every NYC Community Board to help them become more forceful advocates for New York's neighborhoods**

Rosalie Genevro, Executive Director, Architectural League of New York

Among the fundamental requirements for an equitable New York is equitable delivery of public goods and services and fair distribution of environmental burdens across the city's 59 community districts. In 1963, New York City put in place a vision and structure for making delivery of city services accountable to local communities: the system of community districts and community boards that remains in place today. But the system has never had the resources, support, or clout to fulfill its potential and make New York City's government accessible and answerable to both residents and businesses. Community boards are alternately berated for being time-consuming and obstructionist or belittled as having little actual impact. Adding the expertise of planners and architects to district staff could open new opportunities for proactive planning work and more impact.

Doing so would equip every neighborhood—not just affluent ones—with expertise to help them advocate for changes that would strengthen communities and improve quality of life. Leaders should also revisit and act on the City Charter’s coterminality clause, which requires the delivery of city services to align with community district boundaries, an important part of empowering the district system. Rather than continuing to tolerate a frustrating status quo, New York should recommit and invest to deliver on the very important goals that drove the creation of the community district system in the first place.

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## **124. Work across city agencies to create public spaces that are accessible, inclusive, and just**

Setha Low, Distinguished Professor of Environmental Psychology, Geography, Anthropology, and Women’s Studies; Director, Public Space Research Group, CUNY Graduate Center

In theory, public space is equalizing space. Anyone can visit a public park in New York City to exercise, play, picnic, connect with neighbors, and more. But while the city boasts ample green space—more than 16,000 acres—it’s unfairly distributed. The average park size is 6.4 acres in poor neighborhoods, compared with 14 acres in wealthy neighborhoods. While some live within minutes of sprawling athletic fields and waterfront views, others are forced to walk much longer distances or face smaller, more crowded spaces with no amenities. To ensure everyone has equitable access to green space, the Parks Department should launch a collaboration with the Department of Transportation, the Department of Design and Construction, and others to advance accessibility across the five boroughs. A cross-agency perspective could help generate new ideas for how to create new green spaces and refurbish existing parks in neighborhoods like Bensonhurst, Jackson, Chinatown, and Parkchester. Investing in higher-quality, more accessible green space would pay ten-fold: improving air quality and cooling temperatures, boosting physical and mental health outcomes for residents, benefitting local economies, and ultimately creating a city that’s more equitable, sustainable, and cohesive.

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## **125. Use bus network redesigns to reduce NYC’s racial access gap**

Tabitha Decker, Deputy Executive Director, TransitCenter

The MTA is in the midst of redesigning the bus networks in all five boroughs, a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make New York City’s transit more reliable, more efficient, and more equitable. The Queens bus network redesign is currently out for public review and Brooklyn’s chance for better bus trips will be coming soon. The city should seize this opportunity to address a racial gap in access. While the average white New Yorker can access nearly one million jobs via public transit during the weekday morning rush from 7 to 9AM, the average Latinx resident can access roughly 725,000, while the average Black resident can only access 500,000. Even if the redesign improves service overall, these inequities are likely to remain without an explicit commitment to improving and increasing the frequency of bus service in marginalized communities. City and state leaders should insist that the MTA set targets for reducing the racial access gap and communicate on progress with publicly reported metrics. Fair access to opportunity and all the city has to offer is critical to building a more equitable New York.

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## **126. Strengthen NYC's social infrastructure by reforming the capital construction process**

Julie Sandorf, President, Charles H. Revson Foundation

By fixing the City's costly and delay-ridden capital construction process, the Adams Administration has an extraordinary opportunity to leave a lasting legacy of revitalized libraries, parks, playgrounds and cultural centers across all five boroughs, while at the same time saving NYC taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. Installing a new bathroom in a Harlem Park, for example, recently cost the city nearly \$4 million and building a new branch library can easily take more than seven years to complete and costs three times as much (per square foot) as a new office building. New York City cannot afford to squander its limited capital dollars when infrastructure needs are so great. Our libraries are challenged daily by \$1 billion in state-of-good repair needs, parks cannot accommodate the surge in demand for open space and recreational facilities, and community-centered cultural and civic institutions need to upgrade aging buildings. The City's Department of Design and Construction (DDC) already launched capital reforms that are showing real promise, but a lot more progress is needed. The promise of 'getting stuff done' can be realized with a significant commitment from City Hall to reform the practices of multiple agencies that contribute to the inefficiencies in the capital process—including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). These reforms have the potential to improve the lives of every New Yorker—with tangible results that will strengthen communities and prove that public funds can be spent wisely. A win-win for all New Yorkers.

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## **127. Build a circular New York City by supporting local reuse and repair businesses and organizations**

Sandra Goldmark, Associate Professor of Professional Practice in Theatre; Director of Campus Sustainability and Climate Action, Barnard College

Cities are large drivers of consumption and therefore of waste: New York City produces over 14 million tons of trash every year. Currently, over 90 percent of materials extracted globally go straight to landfill, often within a year. In order to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, create jobs, and support an equitable, thriving local economy, New York should strive to become a circular city—to eliminate waste by maximizing the lifespan of goods and materials through repair, reuse, remanufacturing, and other regenerative practices. The city should look to Barnard College's Circular Campus framework as a model and implement its policies across all five boroughs. It could start by granting tax exemptions to thrift stores, dry cleaners that provide alterations, and other reuse and repair services that contribute to a circular economy. Composting should be mandated city-wide with tax breaks for organizations that compost and recycle more than they send to landfill. Pay-as-you-go waste collection would incentivize New Yorkers to seek alternatives for large items, and the city could invest in innovative start-ups working to develop circular infrastructure. Not only would these policies reduce waste and emissions, they would also benefit local businesses, provide more equitable access to high-quality goods, and build community resilience.

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## **128. Invest in ports and industrial zones to create a cleaner economy and more prosperous city**

Bruce Katz, Founding Director, Nowak Metro Finance Lab, Drexel University

The pandemic has reset the context for regional and national competitiveness by revaluing domestic supply chains and manufacturing, tightening labor supply, and emphasizing business and worker equity. In this

context, New York City, a global financial and tech hub, has the potential to also become a hub for re-shoring production and decarbonizing logistics. To bolster its industrial base for the 21st century, leaders should leverage the city's harbors and ports. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer made a promising start with a \$25-million investment in an offshore wind development at South Brooklyn Marine Terminal, answering the call of environmental justice groups for a clean energy transition that promotes high-quality jobs. The city should build on this momentum by investing in complementary infrastructure to support the budding offshore wind industry and other emerging manufacturing sectors. Starting with the Industrial Business Zones identified in Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Queens, the city should continue to work with manufacturers, skills providers, CBOs, and developers to support robust training centers and growing manufacturing facilities. With strategic investment, clean-energy port and production facilities will create jobs that pay well for all skill levels, offering huge benefits to the economy and the environment.

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## **129. Expand transit options by making OMNY the universal "mobility token" for all modes in NYC**

**Jessie Lazarus, Vice President Go-to-Market, CARMERA; Former NYC Chief Digital Officer**

An equitable recovery requires good public transit in every neighborhood. Too many New Yorkers confront unfathomably long commutes to jobs and educational opportunities, but the city could expand transit options by streamlining how we pay for transit service. Today, each transit mode other than subways and buses has a separate payment system. City leaders can unify that fragmented system by adopting the MTA's existing OMNY payment platform as the universal "mobility token" for the city. Turning transit deserts into transit diverse neighborhoods will improve all New Yorkers' access to opportunity and improve New Yorkers' lives every day—the OMNY card could take people from subways and buses to a ferry to a Citi Bike. A universal mobility token would give New Yorkers more options to move out of cars and into public and shared modes, reducing congestion and making streets safer. Additionally, if OMNY were the official common currency for transit in the five boroughs, the city could mandate that new transit options that deploy in NYC accept OMNY. That would create revenue sharing opportunities to put much-needed additional dollars into public transit. Embracing OMNY could transform the city's transit ecosystem to make it more convenient and user-friendly, bring additional investment into public infrastructure, and grow transit modes that make communities greener and streets safer.

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## **130. Give ownership of our digital future to the people**

**Derrick Lewis, Co-Founder and Chair, The Bronx Community Foundation**

Education, health, and economic equity in New York City are all contingent on digital equity. While the city distributed thousands of laptops during the height of the pandemic, not all of them were internet-enabled, and those that were often provided access for only three to five months. Likewise, emergency subsidies for home broadband, which have since been extended, fail to address the fact that two corporations have monopolized broadband infrastructure in New York City and continue to drive up prices. The city needs a long-term plan for universal broadband access and one important piece is shifting the ownership model of internet infrastructure. A community internet trust, similar to a housing trust, would build community power by allowing communities to acquire infrastructure and build models of sustainable ownership. While the city has previously tried to implement similar programs, the grant application process has been too arduous for many CBOs to apply. Organizations in The Bronx, such as THE POINT Community Development Corporation, have started to build a strategy around this idea. We need other organizations to consider this model in their communities. A

streamlined, successful program will require investment in physical and human infrastructure, with workforce and entrepreneurship training from the Department of Small Business Services and other agencies. It will also require collaboration with existing internet service providers (ISPs) to ensure a community internet trust is cost-effective. In addition, massive ISPs like AT&T and Verizon have to be managed appropriately to prevent them from pushing out smaller ISPs and inflating prices.

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### **131. Transform how NYC collects and uses data to improve communities**

**David Belt, Co-Founder, New Lab**

In so many aspects of life today, people’s personal data is being mined, manipulated, and monetized. Technology companies are capturing data on individual’s purchases, hobbies, commuting patterns, and so much more. Although consumer undoubtedly benefit from data in tangible ways—from apps that provide real-time alerts about the next arriving bus to smart devices that enable homeowners to monitor and regulate energy usage—too rarely is data being used to benefit communities that need help the most. There is a tremendous opportunity to change this. City leaders should make New York the test bed for transforming how data is bought and sold—and used for the benefit of New Yorkers. For example, data could be used to identify blocks with the most traffic fatalities and worst air quality, and then make changes that alter traffic patterns, change bus routes, re-route trucks, and create new pedestrian plazas. In public housing, data could help NYCHA create new processes that ensure repairs are made more expeditiously and efficiently. The Adams administration can jumpstart this effort by bringing together data experts to identify these opportunities and then work with agency leaders to develop pilot programs.

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### **132. Help individuals and small businesses take part in the renewable energy boom**

**Celeste Frye, Co-Founder and CEO, Public Works Partners LLC**

The renewable energy industry will expand exponentially in the coming years as New York State works to achieve 70 percent electricity generation from renewable sources by 2030, a target set by the Climate Act. With the record-breaking auction of five wind energy areas in the New York Bight and the largest community solar pipeline in the country, New York’s renewable energy sector will continue to drive the state’s economy, creating thousands of new jobs. To ensure the economic benefits of this renewable energy boom are equitably distributed, New York City should prepare MWBEs, SDVOBs (service-disabled veteran-owned businesses), and other small businesses to scale their capacity and partner with both large local teams and international energy developers. Businesses should have access to trusted information about the products and services offered by this new sector, so they can fit into new supply chains and build new partnerships. The city should also partner with community colleges, technical schools, unions, and workforce development entities to prepare New Yorkers from underserved communities to take on jobs in renewable energy. These communities have disproportionately borne the brunt of environmental injustice and should be equitably included in the green economy.

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### **133. Enforce access to privately owned public spaces**

**Thomas Balsley, Principal Designer, SWA/Balsley**

The tragic and inequitable health impacts of the pandemic have underscored the need for new policies to make the city healthier for all New Yorkers. Exposure to nature boosts well-being: spending time around trees has been proven to lower stress, improve cognition, and decrease the risk of depression and cardiovascular

disease. The city can take a simple step in expanding access to green space by fully leveraging an often overlooked green asset: the city’s 550 privately owned public spaces within blocks of where thousands of New Yorkers live and work. In 1961, New York City introduced incentive zoning that allows private developers to build bonus floor area if they provide outdoor space for the enjoyment of the public at no cost to the city and in perpetuity. This incentive has led to the creation of approximately 95 acres of publicly accessible green space across the city—but the law is not being universally enforced. The Department of Buildings should ensure that every privately owned public space in New York City is welcoming to the public and delivering the quality promised in this exchange. If the law was enforced, the city would have hundreds more green, verdant sanctuaries where passersby could play, picnic, read, visit with neighbors, and more. With an extremely modest fiscal commitment to enforcement—creating a “plaza posse,” for example—city leaders could make a huge impact on the quality of life in the city’s densest neighborhoods.

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### **134. Revitalize low-income neighborhoods and make cycling more accessible by transforming abandoned infrastructure into a network of biking tubes**

Laurie Garrett, Pulitzer Prize Winning Journalist; Columnist, Foreign Policy; Author of *The Coming Plague* and *I Heard the Sirens Scream*

Miles of abandoned railways, tunnels, and bridges across New York City are unused, overgrown, and filled with trash. Above ground, these derelict transit lines are most likely to be found in low-income Black and Latinx neighborhoods—the same neighborhoods where residents have limited access to subway service, Citibikes, and healthy groceries. The city should transform this forgotten infrastructure into an extensive network of bike tubes. Rather than roadside bike lanes, a covered tube design would protect riders from both traffic and the elements, while allowing for outdoor views above ground. Lights and signage would help riders navigate, while digital key access at designated entry and exit ramps would provide security. Such a system could revitalize long-neglected spaces in low-income neighborhoods, attracting new economic activity. It could also make New York’s bike culture less elitist and more egalitarian. While the majority of the city’s cyclists are currently young white men, with the most-used bike lanes in wealthy neighborhoods, an extensive, accessible tube system would enable New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds to reap the benefits of biking, from heart-healthy exercise to better air quality.

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### **135. Tie special permits for last-mile delivery companies to quality industrial job creation**

Laura Wolf-Powers, Associate Professor of Urban Policy and Planning, Hunter College

Last-mile delivery infrastructure is increasingly visible in New York City, from delivery vans double-parked on residential streets to dark stores on local commercial corridors. But residents and small businesses within manufacturing or industrial zones, where last-mile warehouse and distribution facilities are located, are experiencing much starker impacts. From a health perspective, as truck traffic soars, air quality plummets. From an economic perspective, as last-mile facilities gobble up nearly every available industrial space, sky-high real estate prices are squeezing out production businesses. Instead of allowing warehousing, distribution, and logistics establishments as-of-right in manufacturing zones—meaning they require no special consideration by the City Planning Commission or Board of Standards and Appeals—the city should require companies to apply for special permits. Such permits should be granted on the condition that companies promote quality



employment. For example, a last-mile business could reserve space on its property for a start-up industrial enterprise paying below-market rent, or contribute to one of a growing number of city programs focused on creating and training people for jobs associated with climate mobilization. With an assist from a fast-growing league of urban economic titans, New York’s industrial zones could become leaders in heat mitigation, electric vehicle maintenance, and green retrofitting, leading the way toward a more sustainable and equitable city.

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### **136. Reenvision public markets as a type of civic infrastructure that delivers local, healthy food to New Yorkers**

Robert LaValva, Placemaking Consultant, Greensward Advisors;  
 Founder, New Amsterdam Market

Public markets have always been more than places where people buy and sell. When designed and managed with intention, public markets generate economic development, foster social interaction, build community, restore trust in governance, and serve as inclusive places that shape local identity. As such, public markets are not only commercial destinations but civic institutions that merit renewed consideration. To harness that potential, New York City should recognize its retail and wholesale public markets as infrastructure similar to schools, libraries, or transit systems that can improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers. Mayor Adams can build on Executive Order 08, which calls for Good Food Purchasing procurement policies, to leverage markets as part of a more equitable, healthy, and sustainable food system in New York.

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### **137. Reactivate unoccupied spaces in the city’s business districts as a rotating gallery of community-based ideas and solutions**

Laura Sparks, President, The Cooper Union

Many of the initiatives the mayor proposed in his economic recovery blueprint—from assisting new and small businesses, improving public safety and quality of life, reengaging tourists, expanding attainable housing, strengthening the creative economy, growing the green economy, and tackling the climate crisis—are being developed by CBOs across the city. Still-low occupancy rates in commercial storefronts and other spaces in NYC business districts offer ready “gallery” spaces in which to showcase their ideas. Pairing community thinkers with creative makers to visually present their ideas and solutions as temporary exhibitions would be a dynamic way to reimagine the empty spaces with public art, which in turn would build community and engagement around the mayor’s recovery efforts. It could also generate interest for tourism efforts as a free walking tour of New York City’s spirit of innovation and resilience, and garner national attention from journalists and social media content creators.

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### **138. Create an expedited path for as-of-right changes of use to transform underutilized office and retail spaces**

Miriam Peterson, Co-Founder and Principal, Peterson Rich Office

More than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, commercial real estate remains empty across New York City. With so many abandoned offices and subsequent retail vacancies, a full recovery to pre-2020 levels of commercial leasing is likely to take a very long time. To create a more equitable city, leaders should transform these empty spaces to meet critical social needs. Former storefronts could be converted to pre-K and 3-K classrooms, while former offices could be repurposed to meet the urgent need for affordable housing. Despite clear interest

in creative redevelopment projects like these, relatively few have taken place due the difficult and time-consuming process of getting agency approvals for changing the use of buildings, and a lack of leadership to expedite such conversions on a citywide scale. To streamline the process, the city should create as-of-right changes of use through a zoning amendment or a Technical Policy and Procedure Notice (TPPN). New design parameters and a dedicated task force to review building permit applications would make filing for changes of use less costly and less time-consuming. There are several successful models: in Los Angeles, structures of historic significance were given an expedited path to conversion for residential lofts, and Detroit City Planning recently amended their zoning to permit as-of-right conversions of vacant school buildings for residential use. Just as other American cities are repopulating their downtown areas, New York City should join the charge.

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### **139. Pilot a Participatory Justice program in low-income neighborhoods, empowering residents to set the direction for ensuring their safety**

Jeremy Travis, Executive Vice President of Criminal Justice, Arnold Ventures;  
former President, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Public debate often makes it seem as if improving public safety and addressing distrust of the police are mutually exclusive, when in fact one cannot be accomplished without the other. The Adams administration should set a course to accomplish these dual goals by piloting a participatory justice program that empowers community residents to help set the direction for ensuring their safety. Starting with a pilot in one New York community, the program would involve sustained engagement with residents—including young people in communities of color who have long been alienated by overzealous policing but have deep concern for their own safety—in order to find out which hyper-local public safety and criminal justice issues they think should be prioritized, address longstanding issues of alienation and distrust, and collectively define the agenda and investment priorities for creating a safer community with minimal reliance on enforcement and incarceration. With the sustained resources and determination to do it right, the process has huge potential to improve public safety, reduce jail and prison populations, and ensure low-income New Yorkers have an authentic voice in addressing the safety issues in their communities. A long term commitment to participatory justice will yield gains in public safety which in turn will boost economic mobility in the communities hardest hit by both the pandemic and high crime rates.

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### **140. Redesign zoning categories to meet the city’s current needs and expand opportunities for equity**

Leah Meisterlin, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Architecture,  
Planning and Preservation, Columbia University

Zoning codes dictate the geography of opportunity in New York City. Unfortunately, much of the logic that guides the city’s zoning codes is over a century old. Formalized in 1916, the city’s current codes promote a late 19th-century vision of New York that no longer applies. To create more opportunities for equity and keep pace with the dynamism of New York’s built environment, city officials should rethink zoning categories. Leaders at the Department of City Planning should separate retail and office space into categories of their own and create new mixed-use categories that allow more flexibility in both usage and temporality. In doing so, they should distinguish between what a building looks like and how it actually gets used, so that, for example, it’s no longer legal to let apartments sit vacant as investment assets. As the landscape of the city continues to evolve, a task force formed by the Department of City Planning and the City Council could hold public hearings and regularly assess whether or not New York City’s zoning regulations are creating—or obstructing—equity.

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## 141. Revamp NYC’s subway system

Will Raderman, Employment Policy Analyst, Niskanen Center

New Yorkers cannot benefit from a successful city economy without a reliable subway system. Today, however, much of the city’s transit infrastructure is decades behind where it should be and the MTA has lacked the management vision necessary to bring measurable improvements for straphangers. Andy Byford, the subway chief who put the system on a course for much-needed long-term improvements, wasn’t retained. Recent efforts to improve efficiency didn’t result in re-organization and smart investments but serious cuts to maintenance and operations jobs. By late 2021, operator vacancies caused more weekday delays than any other reason. Modern signal systems remain in short supply. Project delays hamper the ability to accelerate trips. New York won’t efficiently address these critical challenges and create the reliable subway system the city needs without a change of course. The MTA’s current leaders should embrace a Byford-esque approach to managing the rebuild. This means eradicating quick cost-reduction measures that hurt long-term, increasing staff to eliminate vacancy-driven delays, and improving service times and frequency. Expanding service operations will mean more employees (per square mile), improved wages, and increased gross metropolitan product (city GDP). The upgrade process will not be simple, but there are no cheap nor easy fixes. Policymakers must address challenges now to save on costs later. New Yorkers in every corner of the city will benefit.

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## 142. Enact new zoning regulations to revitalize unused office space

Eran Chen, Founder and Executive Director, ODA

With the proliferation of remote and hybrid work styles, areas with a high concentration of office space have been largely deserted. In Midtown Manhattan, tall office buildings with failing ground floor retail are taking up excess space and have huge potential. The city should transform them into lively hubs open to the public. Such hubs could mix casual markets, art activation, and green space, with 30 percent of the total space leased with affordable rent. Coffee shops, public art, and retail kiosks, for example, could create a web of economic sustainability for both owners and visitors. The same standard of economic equity should extend into the office building itself, where 30 percent of the office space could be leased to local entrepreneurs at an affordable rent. By regulating affordability and boosting foot traffic, New York could build a more inclusive economy while revitalizing public space.

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## 143. Launch an SMS alert system to promote civic engagement

Carole Wacey, former President and CEO; Lea Giddins, Senior Program and Policy Manager; Women Creating Change

Democracy should be accessible to all, but city channels can be hard to navigate, especially for New Yorkers with limited time and resources. This results in civic opportunity gaps: low-income community districts have lower voter turnout in local elections compared to their wealthier counterparts. The city should begin to address these gaps by implementing a civic texting system. Similar to “Notify NYC,” which provides emergency alerts, the system could provide timelines and information about how and when to participate in elections, community board meetings, and participatory budgeting. To opt-in, New Yorkers could text a designated number to receive a menu of options to customize for language, zip code, and topic. Text alerts could be curated by the Civic Engagement Commission (CEC) and an initial advertising campaign could promote participation. By making information accessible and easy to digest, the city could help residents stay informed, engaged, and empowered to take action on behalf of their families and communities.

# 10

**Foster inclusivity**  
within and  
through the arts

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## 144. Create community choirs across NYC

Schele Williams, Broadway Director; Founding Member, Black Theatre United

Equity is what happens when people actually get to know one another: when they connect, build relationships, and make things together. New York City should create more opportunities for people to experience equity rather than talking about it in the abstract. One powerful way to experience it is through music. The city could do this by creating community choirs in every neighborhood across the five boroughs, bringing people from different backgrounds and different generations together to make something beautiful. To make this happen, city leaders could hire an artistic director who could then recruit choir leaders across the city, as well as special guests like Lin-Manuel Miranda or Jon Batiste. Singing sessions could be held in parks, libraries, and other public spaces, and the songs would reflect the communities singing them. The program could even culminate in a summer concert series, so New Yorkers who don't participate directly can still hear the collective, joyful noise. In a city that can feel vast and disconnected—particularly in the wake of the pandemic—singing together, experiencing that beautiful offering that is both a cultural exchange and a collaboration, could help more New Yorkers connect and experience equity in their communities.

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## 145. Develop a paid internship program in music, media, and entertainment to help expand access to creative careers

Jeanne Houck, Executive Director, Creative Arts Team, CUNY

New York City is one of the media capitals of the world. To create a more equitable creative economy, the mayor and City Council should harness the industry opportunities available by providing entry into well-paid creative careers from an early age. A paid internship program focused on the city's growing music, media, and entertainment industry sector would create more inclusive career pathways for public high school students and ultimately help companies hire workers that reflect the diversity of New York. Rooted in public and private partnerships, the initiative would be led by an advisory council of educators, student representatives, and industry leaders, including company founders and CEOs. Taking on interns would demonstrate private companies' commitment to racial and gender equity in their industries, as well as the city of New York and specifically its youth. It would also introduce public school students to a dynamic networking ecosystem and potential long-term careers in forward-facing fields.

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## 146. Transform underutilized commercial real estate into studios for young, diverse creatives

Alain Sylvain, Founder and CEO, SYLVAIN

New York City risks losing its spark as a growing number of young creatives consider moving to lower-cost places to launch their careers. Faced with unaffordable costs for studio space and enormous rent burdens, New York's rising generation of young, diverse creative talent is understandably uncertain about whether they can build a future here. To craft a stronger and more equitable creative economy, city leaders should carve out space and funding for creatives who lack a professional network and financial support. The city should consider buying or leasing underutilized commercial real estate and transforming the spaces into creative studios, which can then be shared with young, diverse makers via a lottery system. Not only does this turn underutilized buildings into productive places, it also creates economic opportunities for some of the city's most disadvantaged creative talents. In turn, these artists and creators will be able to contribute to their communities in ways they

couldn't before, by sharing art, selling products, and creating portfolios that lead to connections with other city companies and institutions—while generating a return to creative vibrancy in struggling commercial districts.

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### **147. Launch a Creativity Fund to support projects that advance equity in the creative economy, overseen by a chief creativity officer**

Sharese Bullock-Bailey, Festival Director and Chief Innovation Officer, Urbanworld Foundation, Inc.

New York City has a deep base of innovators, artists, and entrepreneurs focused on making cutting-edge creative work. However, the compounding challenges of a prolonged global pandemic and ongoing structural inequities in access to funding, space, markets, and audiences have done serious harm to the city's creative class, especially those rooted in communities of color. To help rebuild a stronger creative economy with a foundation in equity, the city should partner with philanthropic foundations and major private sector businesses to launch the NYC Creativity Fund, with a chief creativity officer hired to oversee it. The Fund would be charged with deploying expense and capital grants designed to help launch new creative ventures and organizations in lower-income communities, shore up the fiscal strength of existing arts organizations and entrepreneurial creative ventures, and ensure continuity over time for businesses and organizations that serve as anchors for existing creative communities.

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### **148. Reimagine and relaunch the Spaceworks model to unlock affordable space for the arts**

David Ehrenberg, former President and CEO, Brooklyn Navy Yard

New York's working artists have played an essential role sustaining the city's vibrancy through more than two pandemic years, all while continuing to sharpen the city's creative edge. However, the pandemic has also exacerbated the vulnerabilities that many artists face, including the loss of venues to produce and present new work and upward pressure on rents for studio, live-work, and maker spaces. To support New York's cultural vitality and rebuild a more equitable and inclusive arts sector in the future, city leaders should focus on expanding access to affordable space for artists, including by reimagining and relaunching the Spaceworks model of a not-for-profit developer and property manager focused on the arts. As a nonprofit provider of affordable studio and rehearsal space, Spaceworks filled a significant gap in the city and its closure in the spring of 2020 has left a hole. The city should draw lessons learned from the operational challenges that the organization faced, while redoubling efforts to unlock more affordable space for the arts. Options include buying class C office condos, signing long-term storefront leases, and redeveloping other parcels of city-owned land to include flexible studio and rehearsal spaces. A major new effort to create clusters of affordable space for working artists—especially those from lower-income communities of color—can help counter the damage inflicted by the pandemic and address the longstanding affordability challenges facing the city's arts sector.



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## **149. Help more young adults prepare for creative careers by expanding the model of creative agency apprenticeships**

Quardean Lewis-Allen, Executive Director, Youth Design Center

New York City's youth and young adults are trendsetters on a global scale. Fashion, design, music, and even memes dreamed up in Brooklyn end up ricocheting across the world via social media and are often absorbed by major advertising and marketing firms eager to capitalize on the latest trend. But far too often, the originators of these cultural movements—often young people of color from New York City—end up struggling to earn a living from their creativity. To help far more young people break into creative careers, New York City leaders should invest in scaling up the creative agency apprenticeship model pioneered by the Youth Design Center (YDC). Modeled as a creative services agency, YDC provides young people with the technical and leadership tools they need to compete in the innovation economy by putting them to work in a hands-on creative agency. Participants learn in-demand creative skills, develop marketable portfolios, and go on to paid internships and jobs in the field. But the program has just one location currently, in Brownsville, and only has the capacity to train about 80 young adults each year. New York City should invest in growing this model citywide and work with organizations like YDC to launch and scale creative agency apprenticeship programs that can help far more young adults gain the skills, experience, and confidence needed to launch into creative careers.

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## **150. Direct 1 percent of the city's annual budget to culture and prioritize investments that build cultural equity**

Sade Lythcott, CEO, National Black Theatre

To help address longstanding inequities in New York's cultural ecosystem—and spur a full and equitable recovery from the pandemic—New York needs to establish a new level of funding for arts and culture and direct these public dollars toward the areas of greatest need. The city's vibrant creative sector accounts for 13 percent of the city's total economy, even as the Department of Cultural Affairs receives less than half of one percent of the city's annual budget. As a result, organizations end up competing for scarce funding, the ever-growing affordability crisis facing the arts remains largely unaddressed, and too many vital arts organizations—especially those led by and accountable to BIPOC communities—end up struggling for survival year after year. To change this dynamic and build lasting equity in the city's cultural sector, Mayor Adams and the City Council should set a goal of committing 1 percent of the city's annual budget toward arts and culture while making changes to the ways that those funds are allocated. Priorities should include baselining multiyear general operating support grants for organizations of all sizes, making major new capacity-building investments in BIPOC-led organizations to help spur long-term fiscal stability, investing in a vastly expanded capital program to help more organizations purchase and maintain physical spaces, launching new affordable housing programs for working artists, and expanding the Special 125th Street District zoning model citywide to incentivize the creation of nonprofit visual and performing arts spaces.

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## **151. Develop a searchable online database of music education programs for underserved families**

Anne Fitzgibbon, Founder and Executive Director, Harmony Program

All children in New York City deserve early exposure to the arts as part of a comprehensive education, but thousands of children are currently unable to access musical training at their public schools and cannot afford private instruction. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of New York's public schools did not have a full-time certified music educator on staff. While there are dozens of music education providers striving to address this inequity, parents are often unaware of them or hard-pressed to navigate such a complicated landscape of offerings. The city should help connect families to existing enrichment opportunities by creating a searchable online database of music education programs by borough and type of instruction. The Department of Youth and Community Development could establish the platform and promote it with the help of schools, public libraries, and CBOs. Participating organizations, ever eager for students, could manage the content by maintaining their own profiles in the style of a Wikipedia database. There are so many organizations poised to bridge existing service gaps. To build a more equitable New York, the city has to more effectively connect New Yorkers to the resources that are already available.

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## **152. Provide guaranteed income for NYC's artists**

Charlotte Cohen, former Executive Director, Brooklyn Arts Council

New York is one of the arts capitals of the world, a status that has brought immeasurable economic and cultural benefit to the city. The arts sector generates billions of dollars in economic activity, creates thousands of jobs, and attracts tourists and residents from all over the world. Yet the foundation for all this—working artists—have never been at a greater risk of being pushed out of New York. High rents and low incomes lead to a cycle of hardship that forces too many artists to either leave the city or give up their practice. To help them survive, and to keep the city's cultural sector strong, city leaders should enact a guaranteed income for working artists. Earlier this year, three philanthropic foundations launched a Guaranteed Income for Artists program, which provides \$1,000 a month for 18 months to over 2,400 artists across New York State. But the city should launch an even more expansive initiative to support a larger community of artists for longer periods of time. Without an aspect of sustainability, artists' careers are not fully protected. A guaranteed income is necessary due to the precarious nature of an artist's career. With a guaranteed income, New York City artists would finally be able to meet their basic needs and be compensated for their contributions to the community.