



Better  
Public  
Meetings

September 2026

# New York City Civic Infrastructure Scan

Research Findings and Strategic Opportunities



Democracy  
Innovation

Perfect  
City



# Partners and Funders

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## *Better Public Meetings - NYC*

This guide was written and prepared by Nick Vlahos, Matt Leighninger, Christopher Boose, and Coleman Stallworth from the National Civic League as part of the Better Public Meetings NYC Project. This project has been made possible through the partnership and support of the following organizations.



Founded in 1894 by Teddy Roosevelt, Louis Brandeis, and Mary Mumford, the Civic League championed the democracy innovations of the early 20th Century; today the League hosts projects such as the Center for Democracy Innovation, maintains the Model City Charter, organizes the All-America City Award, publishes the *National Civic Review*, and supports an extensive national network of local elected, appointed, and civic leaders



Perfect City is a hub for the study and the practice of democracy, founded on the Lower East Side of New York City and growing across the country. They use tools from theater, community organizing, popular education, and design to help communities move away from polarization, toward more inclusive democratic practices.



The Civic Engagement Commission (CEC) was established by the voters of New York City as part of an amendment to the City Charter adopted in 2018. The Commission's mission is to enhance civic participation, promote civic trust, and strengthen democracy in New York City.



The work of the National Civic League and Perfect City on this project was made possible by the Henry Luce Foundation. The Henry Luce Foundation seeks to deepen knowledge and understanding in pursuit of a more democratic and just world.

# Executive Summary

Public meetings remain one of the most visible expressions of local democracy and are expected to accomplish much more than governance alone. Governance here is understood as the way a body structures its internal procedures and fulfills its statutory responsibilities, contrasting with the body's potential as an open-ended civic space. Instead, public meetings are viewed as places where governments deliberate over decisions, residents raise concerns, organizations share information, relationships are built, and communities negotiate competing priorities. This report explores how public meetings can better support democratic participation in New York City primarily through Community Boards. By joining this partnership, the Civic Engagement Commission recognizes its own responsibility to improve our meetings and interactions with the public and looks forward to working alongside our government partners to give all New Yorkers a stronger voice in the decisions that affect all of us. The information for this report was gathered through qualitative interviews with District Managers, Community Board members, Civic Engagement Commission staff and commissioners, elected officials' offices, civic leaders, and two complementary public surveys.

## What are Community Boards?

New York City's 59 Community Boards are local, non-partisan government bodies that connect residents with City government and help address issues affecting their neighborhoods. Each board represents a Community District and consists of up to 50 unpaid members appointed by the Borough President, with at least half nominated by local City Council members. Community Boards assess neighborhood needs, advise elected officials and City agencies, participate in the City budget process, review land use and zoning matters, advocate for improvements to City services, and address concerns ranging from traffic and housing to neighborhood quality of life. Community Boards' mandates encourage residents to participate in local government and broader community initiatives. Many Community Boards permit members of the public to participate through policy-specific subcommittees. Community Boards can make recommendations and advocate for their districts, but they do not have the authority to require City agencies or officials to act.

The New York City Civic Engagement Commission (CEC) is a City agency dedicated to increasing civic participation, strengthening civic trust, and creating opportunities for New Yorkers to engage in local decision-making. Established after voter approval of three ballot initiatives in November 2018, the CEC leads a citywide participatory budgeting program called The People's Money, which enables residents to help decide how public funds are spent. The Commission also partners with community-based organizations and civic leaders and provides language assistance at poll sites for New Yorkers with limited English proficiency.

The CEC plays a supporting role in New York City's Community Board system. Under the City Charter, the CEC is responsible for aiding and training Community Boards, in coordination with Borough Presidents, City agencies, and other partners. This support is intended to strengthen Community Boards' capacity to carry out their local responsibilities.

# Executive Summary

The civic engagement landscape in NYC is characterized by both strengths and persistent challenges. While participation remains uneven and barriers related to trust, inclusion, awareness, and representation continue to shape who participates, there is innovation occurring across Community Boards, civic organizations, and local institutions.

Improving public meetings requires strengthening the relationships, institutions, and civic infrastructure that support democratic participation before, during, and beyond the public meeting itself. This report concludes by identifying strategic opportunities to guide future experimentation, collaboration, and learning across New York City's civic engagement ecosystem.

## Six interconnected insights emerged from the research:

- Neighborhoods in NYC already possess significant civic energy and capacity, but stronger connections can be created between these broader aspects of civic life (student groups, tenant groups, faith organizations, local organizing networks, etc.) and public institutions.
- Public meetings need to resolve a tension between balancing legal governance responsibilities with growing expectations to foster dialogue, learning, and neighborhood participation.
- Different avenues for participation would enable members of the public to fit civic life into busy schedules. Reaching working families, newcomers, younger residents, and historically underrepresented communities requires intentional outreach to where they spend time, welcoming civic spaces that can support childcare, and consistent online and digital opportunities.
- Good practices for engaging the public are present in New York City's civic institutions, but promising practices are not often documented, shared, or adapted across communities.
- Fostering meaningful democratic participation requires supporting the people who sustain civic infrastructure. Training, institutional memory, partnerships, technology, peer learning, and organizational capacity all shape the quality of public participation.
- The Civic Engagement Commission has an opportunity to strengthen the civic ecosystem, not only through programming but also by serving as a connector, convener, and learning hub that supports collaboration and democratic innovation across the city.

# Introduction

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The Better Public Meetings project in NYC is a partnership between the NYC Civic Engagement Commission (CEC), NYC Community Boards, the National Civic League and Perfect City. As community-engaged research, the project offered several ways for stakeholders and the public to provide input on the research and the implementation of pilot innovations during public meetings.

The following report synthesizes themes that emerge across 18 interviews with CEC staff, Community Board members, District Managers, and the staff of elected officials. This report identifies opportunities to strengthen public meetings and invites a broader conversation about the future of civic engagement in New York City. Findings from this draft were presented to the public on July 22, 2026, with 90 people in attendance, at the Lee C. Bollinger Forum at Columbia University. A recap of the event and results from small-group conversations are included. In addition, survey results are summarized from public meeting evaluations (i.e., 113 responses to the League's 'public meeting scorecard') and a broader community survey which was open to the public (96 responses).

Across interviews with Community Board members, District Managers, CEC commissioners, and staff, participants consistently described vibrant civic activity occurring throughout New York City's neighborhoods. Residents are participating through tenant associations, faith communities, mutual aid networks, nonprofits, advocacy organizations, and informal neighborhood groups.

The interviews also suggest that participation is connected to institutional relationships and processes. Across stakeholder groups, participants described institutional capacity as extending beyond staffing and financial resources to encompass the systems that enable organizations to learn, coordinate, communicate, and sustain engagement over time. Hybrid participation, onboarding, committee practices, relationship management, documentation, and shared operational guidance were more than administrative improvements; they were forms of civic infrastructure that enable meaningful public participation.

**"In New York, the organized always win. Some people don't have the privilege to organize."**

Several participants described a growing recognition that institutions must adapt their engagement strategies. One quote ultimately captures the central challenge facing civic engagement in New York City: "In New York, the organized always win. Some people don't have the privilege to organize." As a result, participation opportunities do not always reflect the full range of voices and experiences present within New York City's communities. This insight echoes throughout the interviews and helps connect many of the report's findings.

Collectively, these findings point toward a broader strategic direction for strengthening civic engagement in New York City. Rather than treating public meetings as fixed institutions, interviewees and survey respondents consistently described opportunities to rethink how they are designed, experienced, and connected to community life. Public meetings are not simply procedural requirements; they are civic spaces that can be intentionally designed to build relationships, support deliberation, strengthen trust, and connect residents to decision-making. Rather than offering a single blueprint for reform, this report seeks to document existing innovation, surface common challenges, and identify opportunities for continued experimentation, evaluation, and learning. The strategic opportunities presented in the report are therefore intended to serve as a foundation for ongoing dialogue among Community Boards, public agencies, civic organizations, researchers, and residents on how public meetings can continue to evolve.

# Interview Research Findings

## Finding 1: Institutions Need to Connect to Existing Civic Energy

Interviewees consistently rejected the idea that New Yorkers are simply apathetic or disengaged from civic life. As one interviewee explained, there "seems to be a really robust civil society."

**Instead of seeing participation as something government must create, participants described civic engagement as already embedded within neighborhood life** through schools, libraries, tenant associations, block associations, faith communities, cultural organizations, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and informal networks of residents working together to address local issues.

Across the interviews, participants consistently challenged a deficit model of civic participation that asks why residents do not engage with government. Instead, they suggested that the more important question is why public institutions so often fail to connect with the civic energy already present in communities. As one participant explained, the goal is to move away from a model of "come here and talk to us" toward one in which public institutions instead say, "let us come talk to you." This shift reflects a broader understanding that meaningful engagement begins by meeting people where they already live, work, learn, worship, organize, and build relationships, rather than expecting residents to navigate government on its own terms.

**Participants repeatedly described engagement as a relational rather than transactional process.**

Participants repeatedly described engagement as a relational rather than transactional process. Rather than relying solely on formal meetings, interviewees discussed canvassing neighborhoods, partnering with tenant associations, working through schools and libraries, participating in community events, collaborating with nonprofit organizations, hosting resource fairs, attending food distributions, and building relationships through trusted community leaders. These efforts were described as

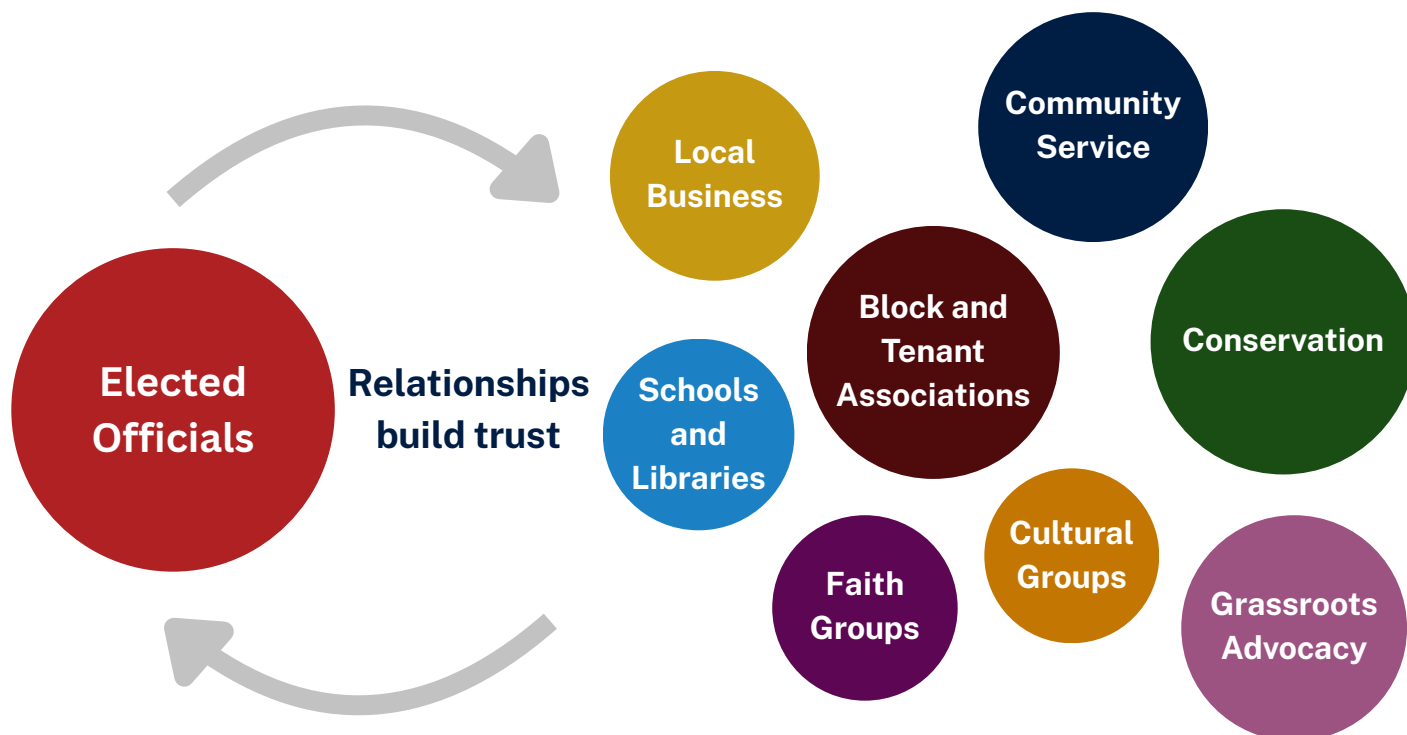
opportunities not simply to recruit residents into government processes but to strengthen existing community networks while creating more accessible pathways into public decision-making.

# Interview Research Findings

Trust-building emerged as another central theme. Participants suggested that trust is not established simply by inviting residents to meetings but by demonstrating a sustained presence within communities, listening consistently, following through on commitments, and working alongside trusted local organizations. As one participant reflected, "people are learning that we're not a typical government," highlighting how credibility develops through ongoing relationships rather than one-time engagement efforts. Several interviewees similarly described skepticism toward government among many communities, emphasizing that partnerships with neighborhood organizations, cultural institutions, faith communities, and community leaders can help bridge these divides because trust often resides within existing relationships rather than within public institutions themselves.

Participants also highlighted the importance of strengthening connections between informal civic life and formal government. As one District Manager observed, "neighbors tend to complain to one another, but not necessarily complain to the right person," while another described their work as helping bridge "that gap in information." These observations suggest that many residents are already discussing community issues, organizing locally, and supporting one another, but their concerns do not always reach the institutions capable of responding. Public institutions, therefore, have an important role in connecting with civic networks, supporting them, and helping translate community priorities into public action.

This asset-based perspective reframes civic engagement as an exercise in partnership rather than recruitment and positions government not only as the creator of civic participation but as one participant within a broader civic ecosystem.



## Finding 2: Public Meetings Should Support Dialogue, Deliberation, and Collective Learning

Across the interviews, participants consistently questioned whether existing public meeting formats enable residents to shape conversations, priorities, and ultimately public decisions. (See Appendix A for public survey results further evaluating public meetings and identifying areas of strength and opportunities for improvement).

While many participants observed that attendance varies

considerably across meetings and communities, they also described regular board meetings attended by dozens of board members and members of the public, with participation increasing substantially when issues directly affected neighborhoods. Town halls, public hearings, shelter discussions, and development proposals frequently filled meeting rooms and, in some cases, attracted well over one hundred participants. These observations suggest that civic participation is highly responsive to relevance, timing, and purpose rather than reflecting a general lack of civic interest.

While most public meetings provide residents with opportunities to speak, many interviewees distinguished between being given time to testify and being meaningfully involved in public decision-making. As one participant reflected, some engagement processes become little more than "a formality to say we've done it," while another observed that some meetings were "not intentionally trying to engage them." Further, another participant remarked that "people don't want to listen to other people talking," reflecting frustration with formats that rely almost exclusively on sequential public comment.

Participants repeatedly described meetings where residents speak to officials but rarely speak with one another. Instead of meetings serving solely as venues for receiving testimony, participants described them as opportunities to develop a greater sense of shared responsibility for community issues. As several interviewees noted, speaking should not be confused with participating; meaningful engagement requires opportunities for residents to exchange perspectives, ask questions, respond to one another, and collectively work through complex issues.

**Speaking should not be confused with participating; meaningful engagement requires opportunities for residents to exchange perspectives, ask questions, respond to one another, and collectively work through complex issues.**



## **Traditional Meetings**

- Residents speak to decision-makers
- Sequential public testimony
- Rigid agendas
- Procedurally focused

## **Alternative Approaches**

- Residents speak with one another and elected decision-makers
- Facilitated dialogue and deliberation
- Shared problem-solving and relationship-building



This led several participants to suggest that different meeting formats serve different democratic purposes, with some designed for governance and decision-making, while others prioritize learning, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. Participants described a range of alternative approaches that encourage more interactive forms of participation, including breakout discussions, facilitated conversations, committee-based dialogue, dedicated public hearings, collaborative design processes, working groups, and small-group engagement. Several reflected that residents are more likely to remain engaged when they feel heard, understand how decisions are made, and can see how their participation contributes to ongoing conversations rather than isolated moments of public comment.

Interviewees also described public meetings as important spaces for collective learning. Residents learn how local government functions, board members develop a deeper understanding of community priorities, agencies hear directly from those affected by policies, and participants gain exposure to perspectives they may not otherwise encounter. Several participants emphasized that committees often offer richer learning opportunities than formal board meetings because they allow residents, board members, and agency representatives to engage in more detailed discussion before issues reach the full board. Others described working groups that continue discussions between meetings, allowing participants to develop ideas collaboratively rather than waiting for the next monthly meeting.

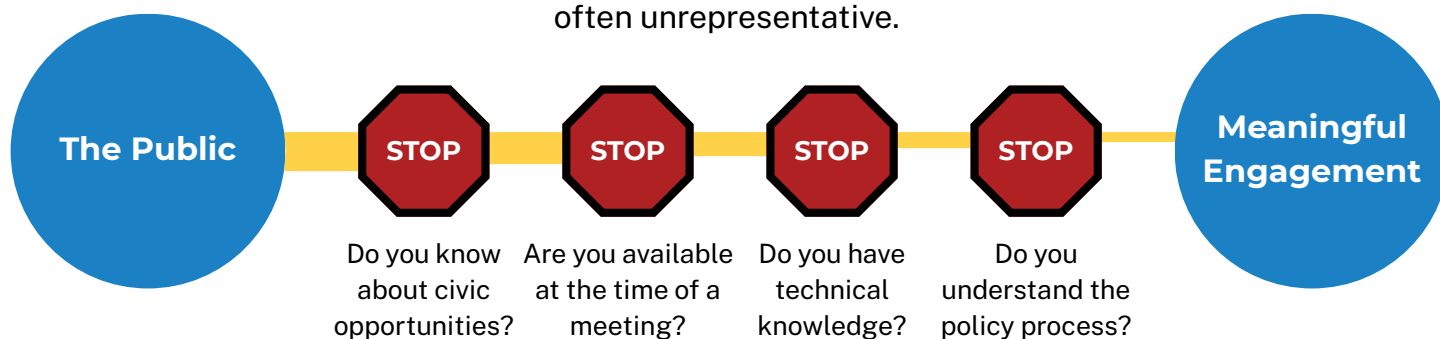
Overall, participants repeatedly pointed toward a broader rethinking of public meetings, from events primarily designed to receive testimony to civic spaces intentionally designed for dialogue, deliberation, collective learning, and collaborative problem-solving. Such a shift recognizes that democratic participation requires more than procedural requirements allow.

## Finding 3: Participation Structures Require Intentional Outreach

Interviewees repeatedly described barriers related to language, expertise, procedure, and power that can make participation difficult for many residents. Several participants argued that meaningful engagement often requires familiarity with government systems, processes, and terminology that many community members lack. As one participant explained, "the public doesn't know that language," highlighting how technical jargon and procedural norms can create barriers to participation. Participants suggested that residents unfamiliar with government processes may struggle to understand discussions, identify opportunities to provide input, or navigate decision-making pathways.

### The Public's Journey to Engagement

Without outreach, members of the public must overcome multiple hurdles to engagement. As a result, the pool of those who successfully engage is narrow and often unrepresentative.



**What is Outreach?** Outreach is much more than simply sharing information through a website, newsletter, or social media account. Effective and intentional outreach consists of deliberately considering your audiences, identifying the best channels to reach them, and meeting them where they normally are. For residents to respond positively to a public engagement opportunity, that outreach must also consider and mitigate their barriers to participation.

Participants also emphasized that many participation structures assume that residents have the time, flexibility, and resources to engage. Working families, caregivers, shift workers, and residents balancing multiple responsibilities were frequently described as facing barriers created by meeting schedules, childcare responsibilities, transportation, and the competing demands of daily life. One participant reflected that hybrid participation is essential because "working families, parents, families with children" cannot always attend evening meetings, while another observed that many constituents are balancing work and caregiving responsibilities that make traditional participation difficult. These observations suggest that participation often reflects institutional convenience more than the realities of residents' lives.

Others pointed to organizational culture as an additional barrier. One interviewee described situations in which there is "a real 'I'm looking down on you because I'm from the board,'"

suggesting that power dynamics and perceptions of exclusivity can discourage broader participation. Such experiences may reinforce the belief that civic institutions primarily serve those who already understand how to operate within them. Interviewees also spoke more broadly about trust, noting that many residents remain skeptical of government, are uncertain whether their participation will make a difference – which is further reflected across the public meeting scorecard and community survey findings section – or simply do not view civic institutions as spaces where they belong. These dynamics were particularly significant for immigrant communities, residents with limited English proficiency, and historically underrepresented communities in public decision-making.

The interviews also highlighted persistent concerns about representativeness. **Several participants noted that engagement processes often attract "the same cast of characters," raising questions about whether existing participation structures adequately reflect the diversity of experiences and perspectives present within communities. This concern was closely connected to broader questions about inclusion and voice.** One participant framed the challenge directly, asking, "How do you bridge that gap with not being heard? Speaking to people that aren't talking." Their comment points to a recurring theme throughout the interviews: meaningful engagement requires reaching beyond those who already participate and finding ways to hear from people who may be absent from, skeptical of, or less visible within, established engagement processes.

Participants consistently argued that outreach needs to be an ongoing process of relationship-building through schools, libraries, tenant associations, neighborhood events, community organizations, food pantries, cultural institutions, and trusted local networks. Interviewees described tabling at community events, partnering with local organizations, hosting resource fairs and town halls, working with schools, and conducting neighborhood outreach as essential strategies for reaching residents who may never attend a formal public meeting. Rather than expecting residents to find government, participants repeatedly suggested that civic institutions must meet communities where they already live, work, learn, worship, and organize. Related to this, those institutions must be mindful of technical terminology and jargon that may make even proactive and visible communications effectively inaccessible to the public. With incredible variation between Community Boards in terms of resourcing and member participation, the use of plain language is not standardized between boards.

**The interviews invite an understanding of accessibility that broadly considers how institutions consider residents' physical and mental ability, financial resources, daily schedule, physical location, social networks, language diversity, and more.** Participation is shaped by whether people know civic institutions exist, understand how they function, believe their voices will matter, have trusted relationships with those inviting them, and possess the time and resources to engage. For many residents, including working families, caregivers, newcomers, immigrants, and those unfamiliar with government, meaningful participation requires that institutions and proactively build relationships within communities.

## Finding 4: Innovation Already Exists Throughout the System

A positive finding across the interviews was the extent to which experimentation and innovation are already occurring throughout New York City's civic engagement ecosystem, though these efforts often remain localized and insufficiently shared across communities. Participants described a wide range of initiatives designed to improve participation, accessibility, communication, inclusion, and community connection. Community Boards are experimenting with new approaches to outreach, relationship-building, technology, language access, and civic participation that reflect the unique needs of their neighborhoods.

One participant characterized their board as "a very vibrant Community Board because we always got something going on," reflecting a broader theme that innovation frequently emerges organically within local contexts rather than through centralized initiatives. Across the interviews, participants pointed to numerous examples of creative practices that have developed in response to changing demographics, resource constraints, community priorities, and evolving expectations about civic participation.

Importantly, successful innovations described by interviewees extended well beyond meeting design. **Community dinners, volunteer recognition events, mentoring programs, neighborhood celebrations, meet-and-mingle activities, resource fairs, and informal gatherings were described as opportunities for residents and board members to build trust, develop relationships, and foster a sense of belonging alongside formal governance responsibilities.**

Interviewees also described considerable innovation in expanding accessibility and inclusion. Several participants highlighted hybrid participation (albeit limited to occasional use), livestreaming meetings online, meeting recordings, transcripts, multilingual notices, interpretation, translated materials, and language-specific outreach as important efforts to reduce barriers for residents who may be unable to attend meetings or who face language barriers. Others described working through trusted community leaders, libraries, schools, faith communities, and cultural organizations to reach residents who are traditionally underrepresented in civic processes.

Participants similarly described ongoing outreach rather than one-time meetings. Weekly newsletters, community calendars, social media, tabling at neighborhood events, surveys, school partnerships, tenant association outreach, community conversations, and targeted communications were all identified as ways of building sustained relationships with residents throughout the year rather than relying exclusively on monthly public meetings.

**These best practices fall into six types, captured on the next page.**

## Improving meeting accessibility

- Limited hybrid participation for board members and presenters
- Livestreaming meetings online and maintaining YouTube archives
- Professional videography and meeting recordings
- Meeting transcripts to improve accessibility and transparency
- Written public comment submissions
- Rotating meeting locations across neighborhoods
- Earlier publication of agendas and meeting notices

## Expanding language access and inclusion

- Interpretation services during meetings
- Translated meeting notices and public materials
- Dual-language meetings and presentations
- Language advisory committees that connect civic institutions with language communities
- Partnerships with ethnic media, faith organizations, and cultural leaders to reach residents in their preferred language

## Building community information infrastructure

- Weekly newsletters
- Community event calendars that aggregate activities across civic organizations
- Public-facing websites that serve as civic information hubs
- Social media campaigns tailored to neighborhood audiences
- Targeted email lists for specific neighborhoods or issues
- Resource guides and directories that connect residents with local services and programs

## Strengthen relationships and civic belonging

- Community dinners and shared meals
- Meet-and-mingle events before meetings
- New member mentoring and buddy systems
- Mixers between experienced and newly appointed board members
- Volunteer appreciation and recognition events
- Community celebrations and neighborhood days

## Meeting residents where they are

- Resource fairs
- Deliberative town halls focused on specific neighborhood issues
- Listening sessions
- Community conversations held outside formal board meetings
- Tabling at neighborhood events
- Partnerships with schools, libraries, tenant associations, and community organizations
- Food pantry events and other service-based outreach opportunities
- Outdoor events designed to engage families and working residents

## Strengthening participation and deliberation

- Working groups that continue projects between meetings
- Public hearings dedicated exclusively to community input
- Breakout discussion formats
- Surveys to inform board priorities and budget requests
- Civic education about the role of Community Boards and how residents can participate
- Community calendars and public toolkits explaining civic processes and opportunities for involvement

New York City's civic engagement ecosystem contains far more innovation than those we spoke with realize. For that reason, Community Board members and District Managers are encouraged to share their best practices for everyone to learn from. There is creativity to be applied, but it's not being documented, evaluated, shared, or adapted across communities. Many promising innovations remain highly localized, dependent on individual District Managers, board chairs, commissioners, or community organizations rather than becoming part of the broader civic infrastructure.

The list above is a set of immediate things that can be applied to public meetings. They don't all have to be tried, nor all at once, and the goal is to test and learn from experimenting with different tools for engaging the public. Strengthening mechanisms for peer learning, communities of practice, and knowledge exchange may therefore represent one of the greatest opportunities for improving civic engagement citywide.

## **Finding 5: Strengthening Civic Infrastructure Requires Supporting Those Who Deliver It**

District Managers, board staff, and volunteer leaders occupy pivotal positions within New York City's civic infrastructure. They manage governance, public meetings, constituent services, communications, relationships with city agencies, volunteer coordination, and community engagement. Across the interviews, participants consistently described these responsibilities as exceeding what existing institutional support systems were designed to sustain. One District Manager summarized the role succinctly, remarking, "I used to joke as the District Manager, I had 12 jobs." Later in the interview, the same participant reflected, "I wish I could work with the community more," highlighting the tension between the desire for meaningful engagement and the realities of limited time, staffing, and administrative responsibilities.

Several District Managers emphasized that the challenge extends beyond staffing levels to the absence of structured professional support. One participant explained that "there's no real guidebook" for doing the work and recalled wondering, "How am I going to do this work without going crazy?" before helping establish the Future of Community Boards Working Group as a peer network for District Managers across all five boroughs. Rather than waiting for formal support systems to emerge, the group created its own community of practice to exchange ideas, troubleshoot challenges, and support one another in the day-to-day realities of the role.

This theme appeared consistently across the interviews. Participants described new board members as often being "very lost" and emphasized that onboarding should extend beyond an initial orientation to include continuing education on the fundamentals of how Community Boards operate. Others noted that training will become increasingly important as long-serving members leave Community Boards and new leaders assume governance responsibilities. District Managers in Manhattan similarly described maintaining their own borough-wide network, sharing advice via email lists and regularly supporting one another as they navigate common challenges.

Interviewees also described institutional capacity as extending beyond staffing and financial resources to encompass the systems that enable organizations to learn, coordinate, and sustain effective civic engagement over time. Participants emphasized the importance of onboarding systems, committee work plans, public-facing documentation, meeting archives, relationship management with agencies and community organizations, action tracking, and shared operational guidance that reduce reliance on individual personalities while strengthening institutional memory and continuity across leadership transitions. These systems were frequently described not as administrative conveniences but as forms of civic infrastructure that enable more consistent, transparent, and accountable public participation.

**Collectively, the interviews suggest that strengthening civic participation requires supporting the people and institutional systems that sustain democratic practice. Training, onboarding, mentoring, peer learning, communities of practice, operational guidance, and knowledge-sharing emerged as critical forms of civic infrastructure that enable local institutions to adapt, innovate, and engage residents more effectively over time.** These findings also point toward an important role for the Civic Engagement Commission (described below) as a provider of training and as a convener and steward of ongoing learning networks that support District Managers, board leadership, and Community Boards across the city.

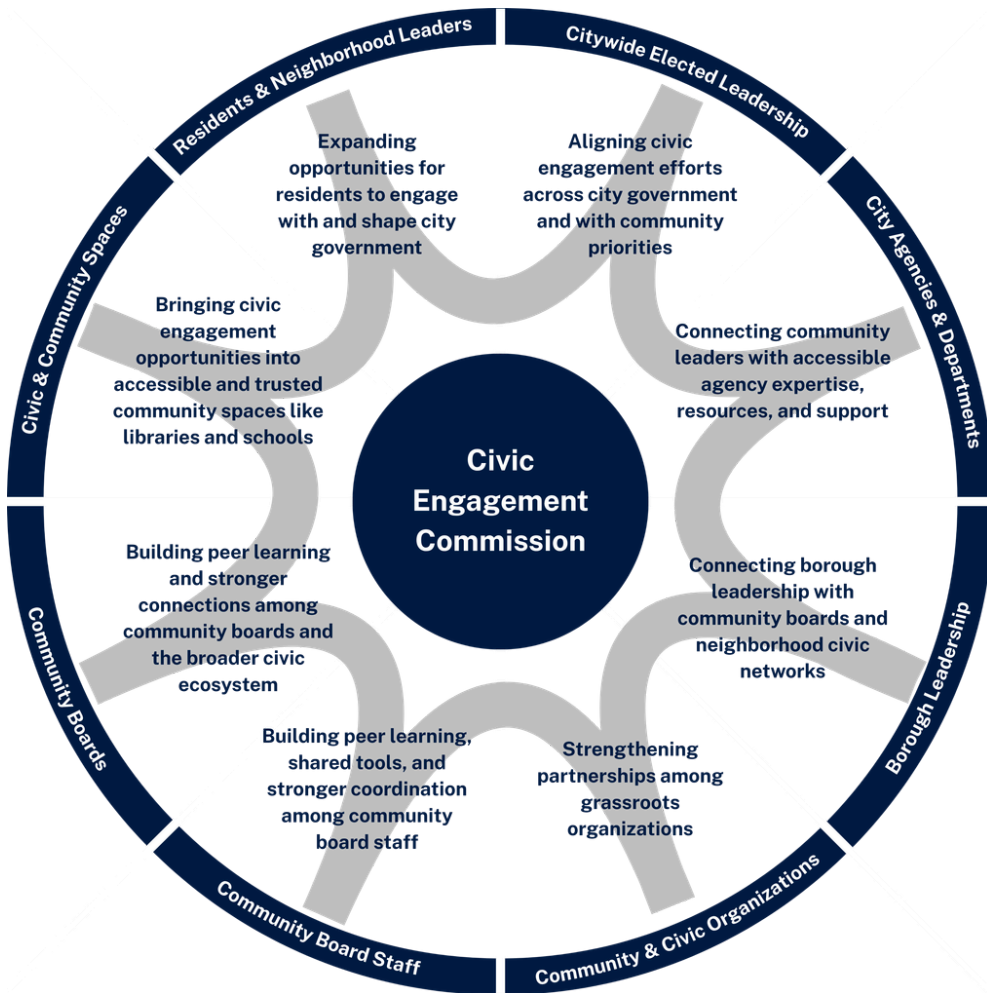
## **Finding 6: The CEC's Greatest Opportunity May Be as a Connector**

Participants expressed differing views regarding the Civic Engagement Commission's purpose, role, and long-term priorities. While some interviewees emphasized programmatic functions and service delivery, others focused on training, outreach, coordination, or civic innovation. Despite this variation, a common opportunity emerged across the interviews.

Participants repeatedly described a civic engagement ecosystem characterized by fragmentation. Community Boards were often described as operating in relative isolation from one another, with uneven access to information, inconsistent practices, and limited opportunities for peer learning. Several interviewees suggested that valuable innovations, lessons, and resources frequently remain localized rather than being shared across the broader system. As one participant observed, "great things [are] happening that others don't know," while another remarked that there are "no communities of practice on how we do and talk about civics." Rather than a lack of local innovation, participants described a lack of institutional mechanisms for circulating knowledge, sharing practices, and coordinating learning across organizations.

Interviewees also pointed to the erosion of institutional memory within Community Boards. One District Manager reflected that "a lot of that institutional knowledge has disappeared," requiring staff to spend increasing amounts of time teaching boards how to function rather than supporting broader community engagement. Participants suggested that preserving and transferring knowledge across boards is becoming increasingly important as membership turns over and experienced leaders depart.

## Opportunity in a Fragmented Ecosystem



**A uniquely institutionalized commission promoting civic engagement, the CEC has expansive opportunities to promote participation across the entire civic ecosystem. This wheel constitutes a menu of options worth considering rather than a prescriptive set of roles.**

Taken together, these observations suggest that the CEC's greatest opportunity may lie in further developing its role as the civic infrastructure connecting New York City's engagement ecosystem. Participants envisioned the CEC serving as a connector, facilitator, and learning hub that links Community Boards, city agencies, nonprofits, libraries, civic organizations, commissioners, and residents. Beyond sharing information, the Commission could cultivate communities of practice, preserve institutional knowledge, facilitate peer learning, strengthen relationships across institutions, and coordinate collaborative problem-solving. Several interviewees further noted that the CEC itself represents an underutilized civic network, with commissioners, advisory committees, and institutional partners possessing extensive community connections that remain largely untapped. As one commissioner remarked, "there are so many untapped CEC networks."

Libraries repeatedly emerged as an example of trusted civic infrastructure capable of supporting this broader convening role. Participants suggested holding CEC meetings in libraries, partnering more intentionally with library systems, and leveraging commissioners' existing relationships with libraries to reach residents who may not otherwise engage with government.

Participants also identified opportunities to strengthen the CEC's own public meetings. Several questioned whether the Commission's meetings could evolve beyond statutory business toward serving as more active convening spaces that bring together residents, community organizations, boards, and agencies to deliberate on shared civic priorities. Nearly every interviewee identified the current meeting format, and particularly the daytime scheduling, as a barrier to broader participation. Others noted that opportunities for commissioners to collaborate strategically outside formal meetings are limited, making it difficult to collectively develop outreach strategies or advance CEC priorities between public meetings.

Relatedly, several participants questioned how commissioners are embedded within community life. More than one interviewee cited the CEC's original commitment to conduct borough listening tours, noting that the initiative never fully materialized. As one commissioner reflected, "our initial charge was that we had to do a listening tour... We never did that." Another similarly described the listening tour as "something talked about years ago... [that] never took off." A commitment to rotate meetings in the boroughs could be one step toward achieving this. Participants viewed renewed neighborhood-based engagement as an important opportunity to strengthen relationships with communities while increasing the CEC's visibility.

Finally, several interviewees pointed to the need for stronger coordination between the CEC and the Office of the Mayor to better align civic engagement efforts across city government. Building on the aspirations of mass engagement espoused by Mayor Mamdani, there were comments around a natural alignment with the work of the CEC, Community Boards and the Better Public Meetings project. Many viewed the current political moment as presenting an opportunity to integrate the Commission's expertise in community engagement with broader mayoral priorities and existing citywide programming, allowing the CEC to leverage its unique statutory role while expanding its institutional influence.

As one of the few institutionalized civic engagement commissions of its kind in the United States, the CEC is well positioned to serve as a laboratory for testing new approaches to collaboration, deliberation, multilingual engagement, community partnerships, and participatory governance.

# Public Forum Event Summary

## *Strengthening Inclusive and Participatory Neighborhood Democracy*

On July 22, 2026 at the Bollinger Forum, the Better Public Meetings NYC project hosted Inclusive and Participatory Neighborhood Democracy, a public performance and discussion. In total, 90 people were in attendance, including Community Board members and staff, civic leaders, and residents.

The session included a live civic arts performance organized by Perfect City called ‘Community Board’, in which members of the crowd re-enacted portions of real Community Board meeting transcripts. The objective of the session was to have members of the crowd walk a mile in each other’s words and reflect on how boards operate, including challenges and tensions around agendas, public comments, and Robert’s Rules of Order.

After the performance, Nick Vlahos from the National Civic League explored findings from the League’s ongoing research, drawing on interviews with civic leaders across local government. Participants were asked to share best practices for Community Boards and then consider, in small groups, what an ideal public meeting entails. Their responses are included on the following pages.



*Above: A member of the public takes the stage as part of the participatory performance organized by Perfect City*



*Above: Dr. Sarah Sayeed of the NYC Civic Engagement Commission addresses the forum as part of the Perfect City-organized performance*



*Right: Audience members reflect and discuss research findings*

## Audience Ideas: What is a best practice for Community Boards?

### Active listening and respectful engagement

- Listen carefully to every concern.
- Create opportunities for questions and dialogue.
- Ensure all voices feel heard.

### Proactive community outreach

- Meet people where they are.
- Use multiple communication channels (email, SMS, outreach).
- Better advertise opportunities to participate.

### Accessibility and inclusion

- Offer meetings in multiple formats (in-person, hybrid, virtual).
- Schedule meetings to accommodate work and caregiving responsibilities.
- Make participation as convenient as possible.

### Relationship building

- Follow up after meetings to report progress.
- Build coalitions and maintain ongoing engagement rather than one-off interactions.
- Understand participants' interests, skills, availability, and preferred communication methods.

### Creating welcoming spaces

- Provide refreshments or food to encourage participation.
- Foster a comfortable environment that encourages conversation.

**Overall takeaway:** Participants emphasized that effective neighborhood democracy depends on listening, inclusive outreach, accessible participation, and lasting relationships with residents.

## Small Group Discussion: What Should an Ideal Public Meeting Entail?



**Overall takeaway:** Participants envision public meetings as well-organized, collaborative, action-oriented spaces that prioritize dialogue, relationship-building, and meaningful follow-up rather than one-way presentations.

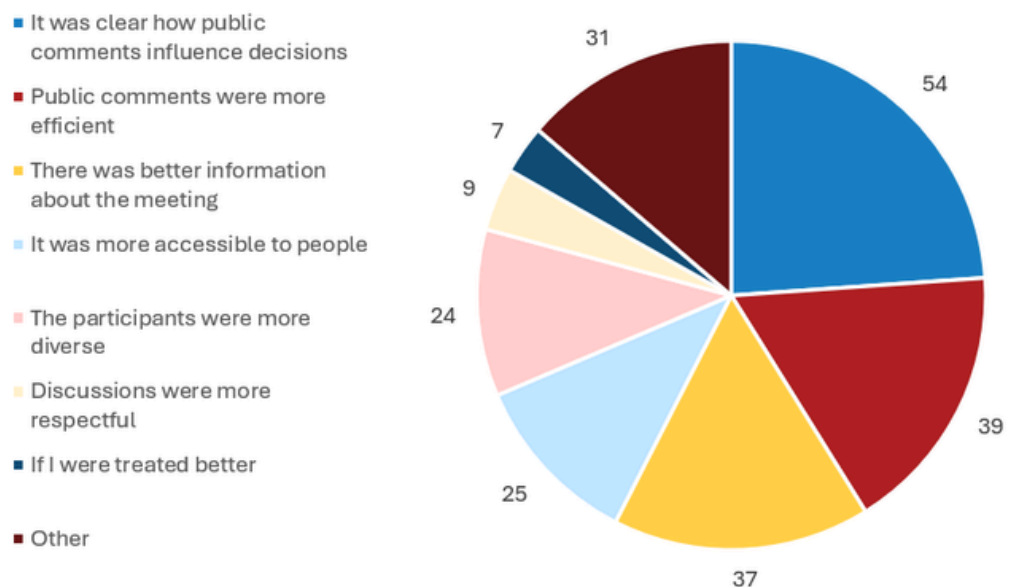
# Survey Research Findings

## Public Meeting Scorecard Findings

A public meeting scorecard, an online survey asking participants to evaluate the quality of specific public meetings which they attended, was offered at 8 public meetings, including CEC, NYCHA in Your Neighborhood, Rental Ripoff, and Community Board meetings. There were 113 public responses. Overall, the results suggest that participants generally had a positive experience and highlight several recurring opportunities to strengthen transparency, accessibility, and participant engagement. A majority of respondents (58%) rated their experience as good, and over half (51%) spoke during the meeting, indicating that meetings allow for public participation via testimony. Participants most frequently identified the opportunity to be heard, respectful interactions, effective engagement with officials and staff, and accessible meeting environments as key strengths. Most participants were repeat attendees (66%), suggesting these meetings have an engaged, returning audience, although one-third were first-time participants, demonstrating that new residents do show up to civic events.

The most notable finding is that participants are looking for stronger connections between public input and decision-making. **By far the largest area for improvement, selected by 54 respondents, was clarifying how public comments influence decisions.** This aligns with broader perceptions of civic governance throughout the survey: respondents generally felt that leaders only sometimes listen to residents, public information is only sometimes clear, and trust in the decision-making process remains moderate rather than high. These results suggest that while residents value opportunities to participate, many remain uncertain whether their participation leads to tangible outcomes. Closing the feedback loop by communicating how community input is considered and acted upon represents an important opportunity to implement after public meetings.

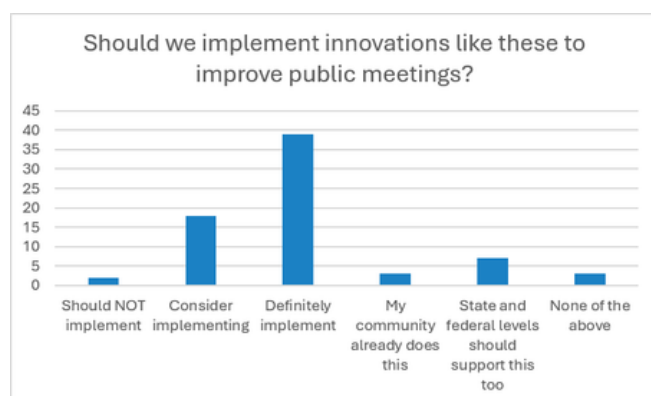
The meeting would be better if...



Accessibility emerged as another consistent reflection. Although respondents viewed meetings as generally accessible, comments highlighted several barriers to participation, particularly for first-time attendees and underrepresented groups. Participants requested clearer information before meetings, better explanations of meeting procedures and terminology, improved interpretation and language access, shorter meetings, better audio quality, and more welcoming environments for residents unfamiliar with government processes. Several comments also noted difficulties navigating registration, understanding speaking procedures, and engaging with information tables, suggesting that improving participant orientation and reducing procedural complexity could significantly improve the meeting experience.

The need to improve meeting operations was also consistently noted. Respondents recommended shorter meetings, stronger facilitation, better time management, improved enforcement of speaking limits, and clearer organization of meeting spaces to reduce noise and confusion. While relatively few respondents expressed concerns about respectful treatment, several comments criticized meeting leadership or meeting structure, indicating that facilitation quality can have a substantial influence on participant perceptions. Addressing these logistical issues would likely improve participant satisfaction and accessibility without requiring significant structural changes.

The broader civic indicators paint a picture of communities with moderate levels of engagement but room for growth. Most respondents reported that their communities have some volunteer activity, moderate levels of public information quality, and some degree of interaction across different groups. However, trust in government decision-making, perceptions that leaders listen, and connections between community groups all clustered around the middle of the scale rather than the highest categories. Similarly, respondents perceived moderate levels of community conflict rather than either high cohesion or severe division. Collectively, these findings suggest communities that are engaged but not yet fully connected or confident in public institutions.



Finally, respondents expressed strong support for innovation in public engagement. More than half of participants indicated that new approaches to improving public meetings should definitely be implemented, with additional respondents supporting consideration of new practices or broader governmental adoption. This openness to innovation, combined with findings on transparency and accessibility, indicates participants' readiness

for reforms that make meetings more understandable, inclusive, and responsive. Overall, the results point to a clear opportunity to build on existing strengths in participation while prioritizing transparency about decision-making, simplifying the meeting experience, and improving accessibility and facilitation to deepen public trust and engagement.

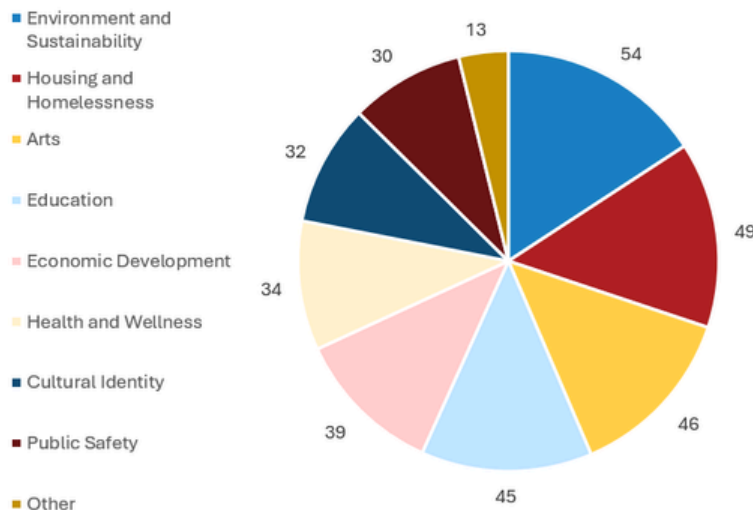
## Community Survey Findings

The NYC Community Survey, a more open-ended online survey which asks respondents to broadly evaluate their community's civic participation, received 96 responses. **Respondents demonstrate a strong civic orientation**, with most participating in community activities at least monthly, nearly two-thirds having attended a public meeting within the past year, and many regularly engaging with local government by voting, following city updates, or communicating with elected officials. Moreover, participants hoped to see yet more civic engagement in their community. **However, the survey suggests that participation is driven less by civic obligation than by a desire to improve local communities. Making a difference locally was by far the strongest motivation for engagement, as reflected in open-ended responses emphasizing responsibility, community stewardship, climate action, and the importance of setting an example for future generations.** Respondents were most connected to issues affecting community wellbeing, including environmental sustainability, housing and homelessness, education, and health, indicating that civic participation is closely tied to improving everyday quality of life.

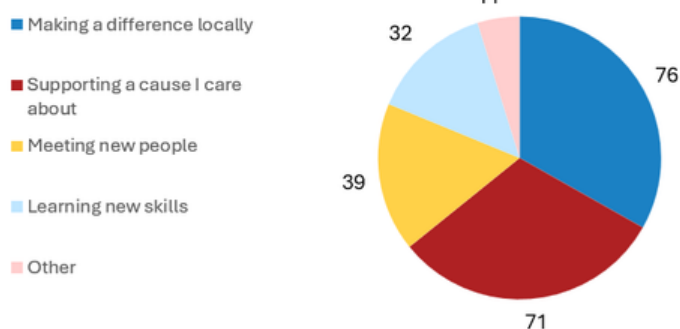
The survey also portrays civic engagement as a social and community-based activity. Residents most often connect through parks, neighborhood gathering places, volunteer activities, online communities, and community organizations, while relying primarily on email newsletters, social media, and word of mouth to stay informed about local events. This suggests that civic participation extends well beyond formal government meetings and exists in community relationships and local networks.

Respondents also consistently identified gaps in the effectiveness and inclusiveness of local civic life. While most felt that community leaders sometimes listen to residents, relatively few believed residents have genuine influence over decisions. Similarly, an overwhelming majority felt that New York City needs more local civic engagement, even though many respondents themselves are already active participants. This reflects a broader perception about who participates, how

What issues or causes do you feel connected to in your community?



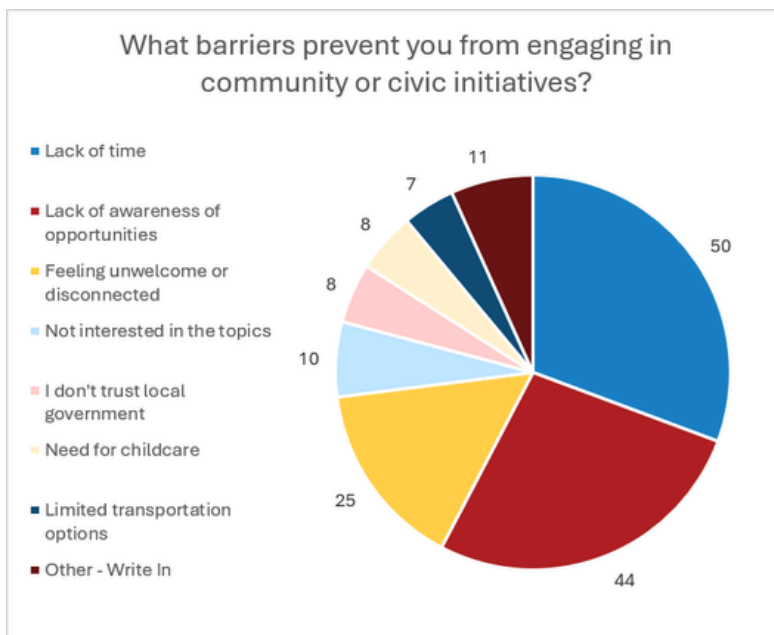
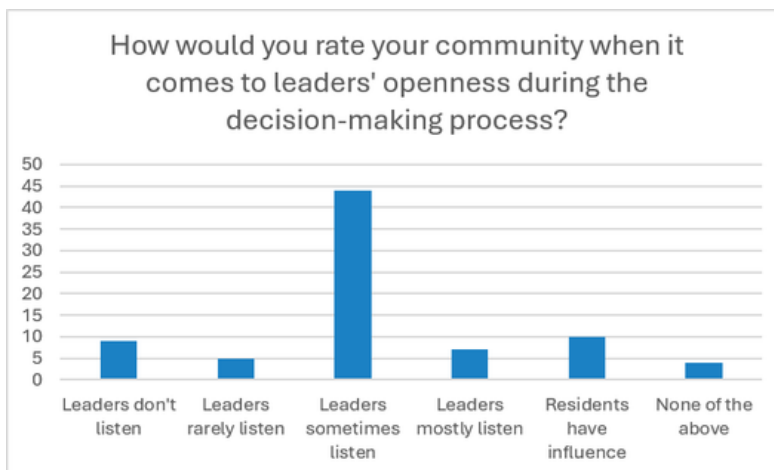
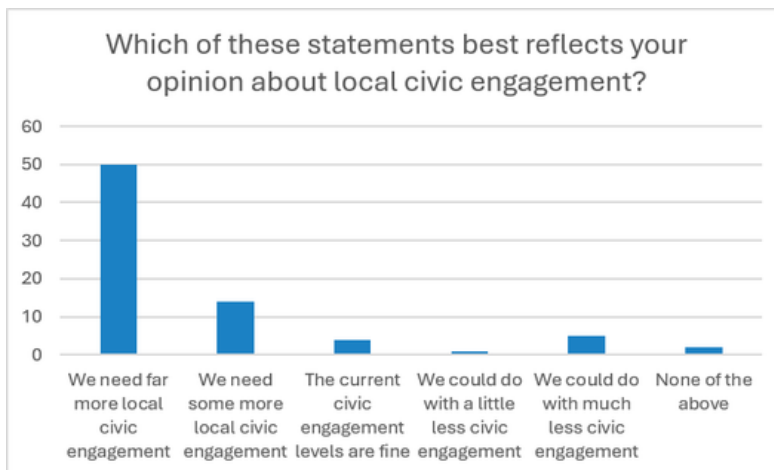
What motivates you to participate in your community?



participation is structured, and whether it shapes public decisions. Concerns that "the same people are always involved," combined with perceptions of disconnected institutions and only moderate civic infrastructure, point to a desire for broader, more representative participation rather than simply greater participation overall.

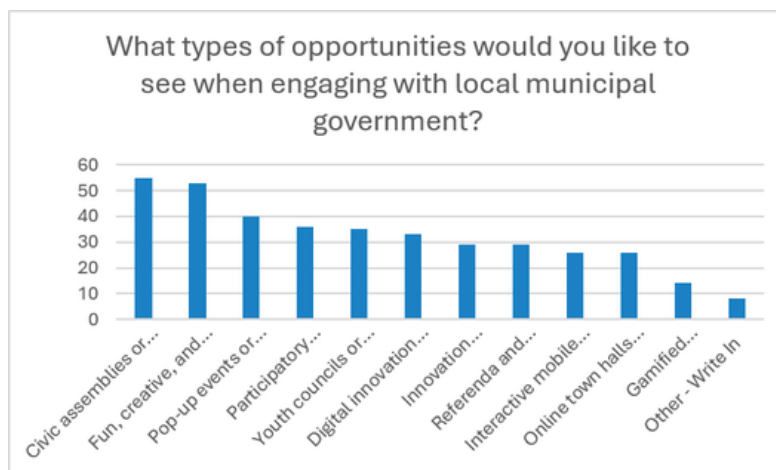
The barriers identified by respondents reinforce this interpretation. Lack of time and limited awareness of engagement opportunities were the most common practical obstacles, but comments also revealed deeper concerns about the accessibility and sometimes legitimacy of civic processes. Respondents described official engagement channels as difficult to navigate, dominated by established participants, and unclear about how public input influences policy or funding decisions. Several comments expressed frustration that participation can feel performative rather than consequential, suggesting that **strengthening civic trust may depend as much on demonstrating impact as on increasing opportunities to participate.**

Looking forward, respondents expressed considerable openness to reimagining civic engagement. The strongest support was for civic assemblies and deliberative decision-making, as well as creative community gatherings, participatory budgeting, neighborhood workshops, and youth engagement initiatives. Respondents appeared to favor expanding the range of opportunities available through more collaborative, accessible, and community-oriented approaches. Suggestions such as



# Survey Research Findings

integrating arts and culture into civic participation, simplifying government communication, using apartment buildings and neighborhood institutions as information hubs, and creating more intergenerational spaces illustrate a vision of civic engagement that is woven more naturally into everyday community life.



## Cross-Survey Reflections

Although the Community Survey and Public Meeting Scorecard were administered to different audiences, together they provide an overlapping picture of civic engagement in New York City. The Community Survey reflects residents' broader perceptions of civic life, while the Public Meeting Scorecard captures the experiences of people who are already participating in formal engagement opportunities. Viewed together, the findings reveal a civic ecosystem that is active and motivated, but where opportunities exist to strengthen participation, accessibility, and trust.

One of the strongest themes across both surveys is that New Yorkers are willing to engage in civic life but want that engagement to be more meaningful. Community Survey respondents expressed a strong desire for greater local civic engagement and identified making a difference locally as their primary motivation for participating. Similarly, public meeting attendees generally reported positive experiences and valued opportunities to speak, respectful dialogue, and interactions with public officials. However, both groups raised similar concerns about the relationship between participation and decision-making. Community respondents indicated that leaders only sometimes listen to residents and questioned whether participation influences outcomes, while meeting attendees most frequently identified greater transparency about how public comments influence decisions as the single greatest opportunity for improvement.

**Together, these findings suggest that increasing participation alone is unlikely to strengthen civic trust unless participants can clearly see how their input contributes to decisions and actions.**

The surveys also illustrate that barriers to engagement differ depending on where residents are in their civic journey. Among the broader community, the most significant barriers are practical and motivational, particularly limited time, lack of awareness of opportunities, and uncertainty that participation will have an impact. Once residents attend a public meeting, however, the barriers shift toward the quality of the experience itself. Meeting participants highlighted the need for clearer communication before meetings, simpler participation processes, improved language access, stronger facilitation, shorter meetings, and clearer explanations of meeting procedures. This progression suggests that improving civic participation requires attention to

both recruitment and retention: helping more residents discover opportunities to participate while also ensuring that first-time experiences are welcoming, understandable, and worthwhile.

The findings also point to opportunities to broaden participation while maintaining the strengths of existing civic networks. Community Survey respondents frequently observed that the same individuals tend to dominate civic engagement, reflecting concerns about representation and inclusivity. At the same time, the Public Meeting Scorecard found that approximately one-third of attendees were participating in that type of meeting for the first time, indicating that public meetings continue to attract new participants alongside a core group of regular attendees. This suggests an opportunity to build on existing participation by creating clearer pathways for newcomers to become informed, confident, and sustained contributors to civic life.

Finally, community respondents expressed strong interest in approaches such as **civic assemblies, participatory budgeting, creative community events, youth engagement, and hybrid participation opportunities**. Meeting attendees similarly supported implementing new approaches to improve public meetings and offered practical recommendations to make meetings more accessible, inclusive, and responsive.

**These findings suggest that residents are receptive to civic engagement beyond traditional formats, so long as new approaches remain transparent, accessible, and clearly connected to public decision-making.** To maintain a pulse on public input, public meetings should continuously have the Public Meeting Scorecard on hand for people to fill out. The Scorecard provides the public an opportunity to evaluate their experiences at these meetings but also allows staff to consider how to make adjustments.

# Strategic Opportunities

## 1. Redesign Public Meetings to Balance Governance with Meaningful Participation

The research describes a tension between governance requirements and meaningful public participation. While public testimony remains an essential component of democratic decision-making, many participants argued that testimony alone provides limited opportunities for dialogue, learning, deliberation, and collaborative problem-solving. Traditional meeting formats often prioritize presentations, reports, and procedural business while limiting opportunities for residents to exchange perspectives, shape discussions, and contribute substantively to public decisions.

Rather than expecting a single meeting to satisfy every democratic objective, participants suggested designing a broader ecosystem of engagement that complements formal governance with opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and relationship-building before, during, and after public meetings. Potential opportunities identified during the interviews include:

### Strengthen deliberation and dialogue

- Greater use of facilitated discussions and small-group deliberation.
- Annual neighborhood prioritization forums organized around collaborative problem-solving.
- Opportunities for residents to share experiences across perspectives and report back collectively.
- Exploration of deliberative engagement models, including civic lotteries for public participants or advisory bodies.

### Separate engagement from governance where appropriate

- Dedicated public engagement events that complement formal governance meetings.
- Borough-based listening tours that bring institutions directly into neighborhoods.
- Community engagement activities held in familiar neighborhood settings.
- Rotating meetings through libraries, community centers, and other accessible venues.

### Expand participation before, during, and after meetings

- Better framing and advance notice so participants arrive prepared.
- A stronger throughline of participation before, during, and after meetings, including follow-up to demonstrate how public input influenced decisions.
- Expanded asynchronous participation through digital platforms, online feedback, video submissions, and other nontraditional forms of input.
- Enabling residents to take greater ownership of community discussions and collective decision-making.

## Build relationships alongside governance

- Incorporating opportunities for creative expression, community celebrations, and family-friendly activities that strengthen relationships and encourage participation from younger people and families.
- Creating opportunities for community-building that complement formal public testimony.

These opportunities aim to broaden who participates, how people participate, and how public meetings contribute to learning, trust, and democratic decision-making while preserving the governance responsibilities that Community Boards are required to fulfill.

## 2. Establish Baseline Standards and Support Across Community Boards

Participants repeatedly emphasized that Community Boards operate under highly uneven conditions. Differences in staffing, resources, technology, communication capacity, meeting access, and operational support create significant variation in residents' experiences across the city. Interviewees identified opportunities to establish consistent minimum standards while preserving local flexibility, including:

- Standardized expectations for hybrid access, recordings, transcripts, and public notice.
- Consistent website and communications practices.
- Defined staffing models that include both administrative and community engagement responsibilities.
- Orientation and onboarding programs for new board members.
- Structured mentoring and pairing programs connecting experienced and newer members.
- Succession planning and institutional memory strategies.
- Advisory opportunities for former board members to continue contributing expertise.
- Shared operational guidance and best-practice resources.

Several participants noted that participation challenges often stem from limited institutional capacity rather than a lack of commitment to engagement. In addition to staffing and operational support, interviewees highlighted the importance of stronger onboarding systems, committee practices, governance guidance, relationship management, public-facing documentation, and mechanisms to preserve institutional knowledge during leadership transitions. These investments were frequently described as strengthening the civic infrastructure that allows participation efforts to become more consistent, transparent, and sustainable over time.

## 3. Strengthen the CEC's Role as a Connector

The interviews suggest that one of the Civic Engagement Commission's greatest opportunities may lie not only in program delivery but in ecosystem leadership. Participants repeatedly described Community Boards, agencies, nonprofits, libraries, commissioners, civic organizations, and residents operating in relative isolation despite pursuing related goals.

Several participants also described uncertainty regarding the CEC's role, mandate, and relationship to Community Boards. At the same time, many pointed to opportunities for the CEC to fill coordination gaps that no other institution is currently positioned to address. Potential opportunities include:

- Convening cross-community-board learning opportunities.
- Creating regular communities of practice focused on civic engagement.
- Supporting stakeholder mapping and network-building efforts.
- Connecting commissioners more directly with community engagement activities.
- Building stronger partnerships with libraries, nonprofits, city agencies, and community organizations.
- Supporting presentations and exchanges between boards, commissioners, borough presidents, and civic leaders.
- Coordinating citywide awareness and outreach efforts.
- Leveraging departmental partnerships to distribute civic engagement information through existing trusted networks.

A longer-term opportunity for the CEC is to help connect the civic ecosystem of independent, yet fragmented organizations with concerted opportunities.

# Areas for Future Research

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Future research around public meetings in NYC can build upon these initial findings:

- **Evaluation and Pilot Projects:** Many of the practices identified during interviews, such as limited hybrid participation, deliberative engagement, community dinners, public committee members, mentoring programs, and asynchronous participation, are already being used across individual Community Boards. Future work could identify opportunities to evaluate these approaches, compare outcomes across boards, and support pilot projects that generate transferable lessons.
- **Institutional Capacity:** Additional research could examine how institutional capacity influences civic participation. Interviewees repeatedly suggested that onboarding, committee practices, documentation, relationship management, governance structures, and institutional memory shape participation in important ways. Better understanding these organizational factors may help distinguish which investments most effectively strengthen public engagement over time.
- **Democratic Innovation:** Participants also pointed toward opportunities to explore deliberative and participatory approaches beyond traditional public testimony. Future work might examine the potential role of civic assemblies, facilitated dialogue, participatory budgeting, civic lotteries, digital participation platforms, youth advisory structures, and other democratic innovations within New York City's civic engagement ecosystem.
- **Digital Civic Infrastructure:** The interviews also raise broader questions regarding digital civic infrastructure. Beyond livestreaming meetings, future work could examine how digital platforms might integrate agendas, meeting materials, written testimony, proposals, surveys, public feedback, committee work, and follow-up into more continuous forms of civic participation before, during, and after meetings. Decidim was a recurring platform for further analysis of use across public meeting infrastructure.
- **Comparative Research:** Several participants described significant differences among Community Boards in staffing, governance practices, communications, technology, and community relationships. Further research can identify transferable practices that could help establish stronger baseline standards while preserving local flexibility.
- **Community Board Governance:** Finally, many interviewees raised broader questions regarding neighborhood governance, including onboarding, committee structures, appointment processes, public committee members, and the evolving roles of District Managers, board chairs, and executive committees.

# Conclusion

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## *Building Civic Engagement in NYC Public Meetings*

So much of how we think about public meetings centers on their management. Was there a quorum? Was the agenda followed? Did the meeting finish on time? These questions matter because public meetings are responsible for conducting official public business. Yet we should be thinking about the design of these meetings. What is a public meeting trying to accomplish? Who is present, and who is not? How should a room be arranged? Did participants feel heard, which is different from simply being allowed to speak? What happens before and after a meeting? What technologies can support participation? How do we know whether public input influenced decisions?

If we could redesign a public meeting today, where would our imagination take us? Would it begin with public testimony, or with a community meal, a youth performance, a neighborhood conversation, a listening session, or opportunities for residents to build relationships before discussing policy? Could different meetings serve different purposes while still fulfilling their legal responsibilities?

The interviews presented in this report suggest that New York City's civic engagement system stands at an important moment of opportunity, not least because of a mayoral administration which invites mass civic mobilization. **Improving public meetings should not be viewed as an isolated reform effort.** Public meetings operate within a broader civic ecosystem shaped by organizational capacity, institutional trust, governance practices, communications infrastructure, community relationships, and opportunities for learning. Strengthening these surrounding systems may be as important as redesigning meeting formats themselves, which means that better public meetings are one component of a broader strategy for strengthening local democracy.

New York City already possesses ingredients needed to advance this work: being embedded in the NYC Charter, active communities, committed public servants, innovative local practices, dedicated volunteers and residents, and growing interest in democratic renewal. Across the interviews, participants described examples of experimentation that are already expanding participation, strengthening relationships, and improving civic infrastructure. The opportunity now is to identify, evaluate, share, and scale these emerging practices while continuing to invest in the institutional capacity that enables meaningful participation over time. Beyond identifying practices, public meetings can become ongoing spaces to test and learn from democratic innovation.

# Conclusion

Nonetheless, the findings suggest that existing participation systems often reward those who possess time, knowledge, networks, organizational capacity, and familiarity with government processes. At the same time, many residents face barriers related to language, access, confidence, documents with technical language, competing private responsibilities, or limited awareness of civic institutions. Reform efforts need to ensure opportunities for participation are meaningfully connected to decision-making and accessible to those who are least likely to be heard through traditional channels.

The CEC, Community Boards, city agencies, researchers, civic organizations, and residents all have a role to play in trying new agendas, meeting formats, deliberative processes, and civic technologies. The strategic opportunities outlined in this report represent promising directions rather than a final blueprint. Future work could build on these findings through pilot projects, comparative research across Community Boards, evaluation of innovative engagement practices, and continued exploration of how governance, digital civic infrastructure, institutional capacity, and deliberative participation can strengthen New York City's civic ecosystem. By building on innovations already emerging throughout the city, New York has an opportunity not only to improve public meetings but also to become a national leader in reimagining how local democracy works.

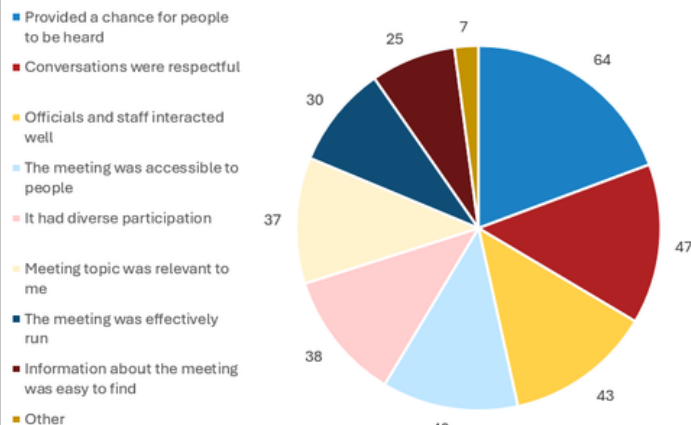


# Appendix A

## Public Meeting Scorecard Results (113 responses, evaluating specific public meetings)



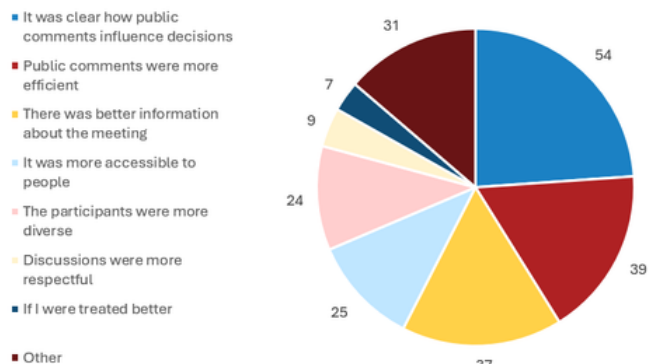
What was good about the meeting?



## Write-in Comments

- security line was quick
- provided a chance for people to be heard, it had diverse participation, meeting topic was relevant to me
- getting the resources and information to us and being heard
- Unorganized confusing and ineffective
- It happen that about all cb13q

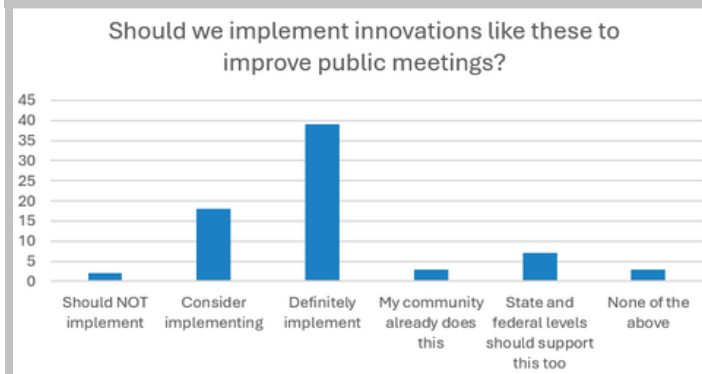
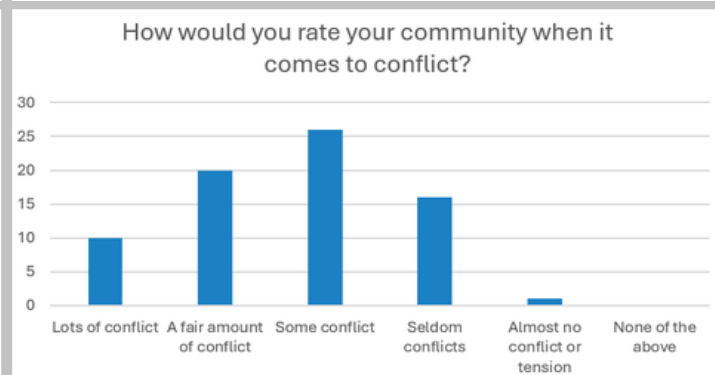
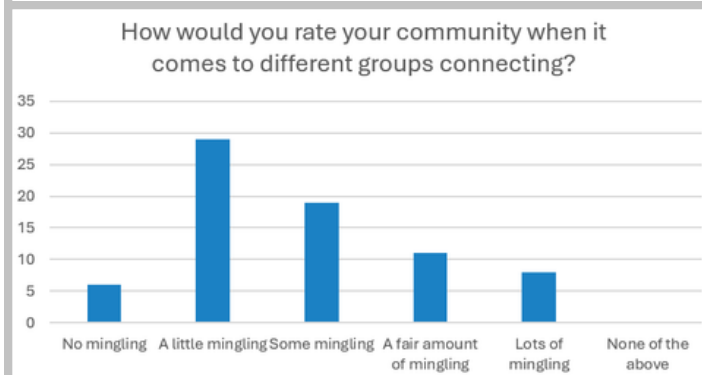
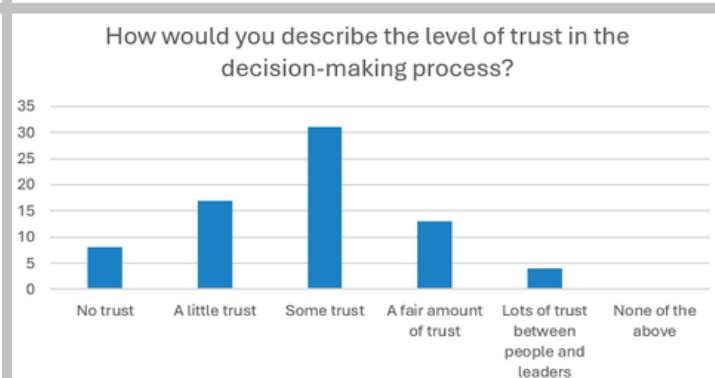
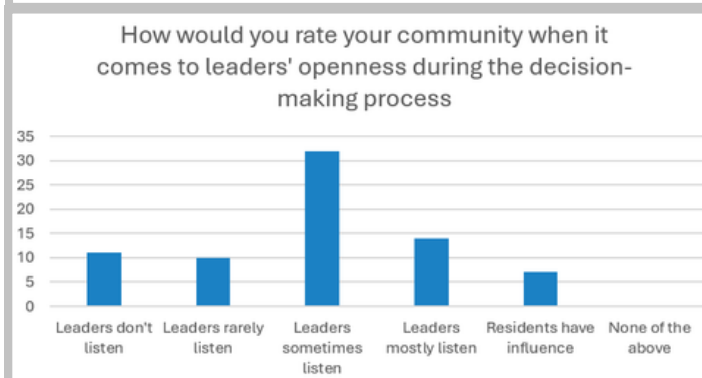
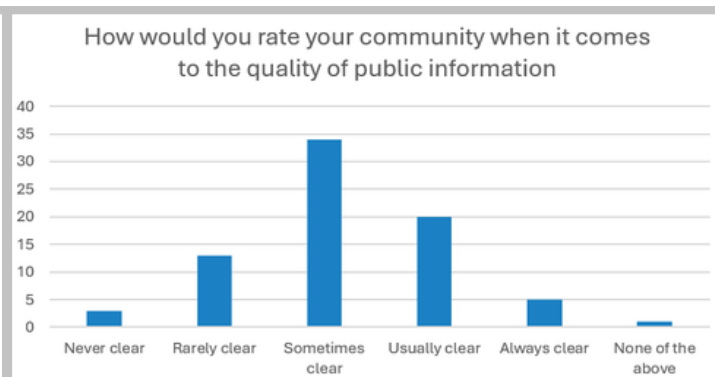
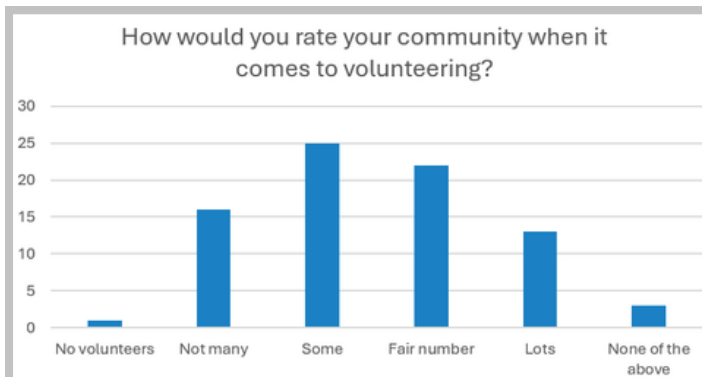
The meeting would be better if...



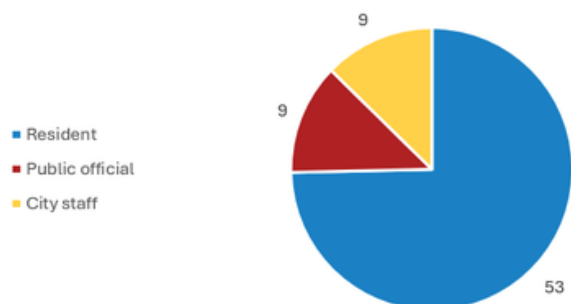
## Write-in Comments

- increased public attendance
- broader public participation.
- more people attended
- This should be held biannually
- i thought it would be a forum. this wasn't a hearing, it was an opportunity to submit a complaint in person
- If we were given more information about what to prepare ahead of time. I didn't realize I would only have 3 minutes today.
- you didn't have to wait to speak
- Workers were better at initiating conversations. I didn't always know how to approach a booth to get information if I didn't already know what it was.
- accessibility to my issues and what next

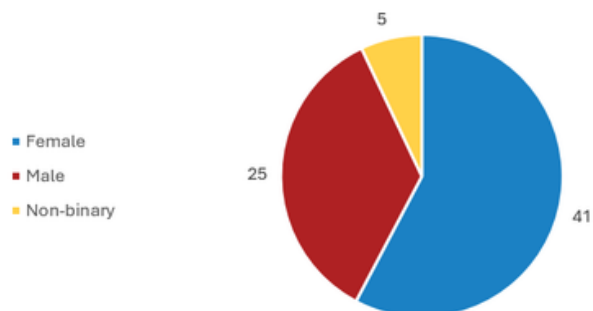
- if we can have separate rooms from where the information tables because that background noise interfered with Cea Weaver and others as they spoke. Public speaking, even as a professional can be hard at times, especially if there's other background noise other than that I have no other concerns.
- the chair would speak less
- Chairperson speaks too much and tries to wield too much control of the board.
- timing constraints were enforced
- someone would help each use the mic well.
- 3-4 hour meetings are not accessible.
- The meetings need to be shorter. 4 hrs is too long.
- shorter meeting
- there were food
- it was hard to hear the speakers. audio/acoustics were poor.
- Not as community friendly regarding concerns
- If the meetings were better run and attendees weren't from the same group.
- Tenants that do not speak english or use computers struggled to register. We has to argue for them to be let in before 7pm. It was ageist and unethical.
- It was more accessible to people. What I mean by this is that the terminology is very complex and hard to understand, especially when you've never been there before. There is nobody teaching you what the terminology means, what the flow of the meetings are, there isn't a recap to say what is being continued, or anything. It will only make sense when you've been going consistently, know someone whos been going, or been able to get context online; all of which is inaccessible.



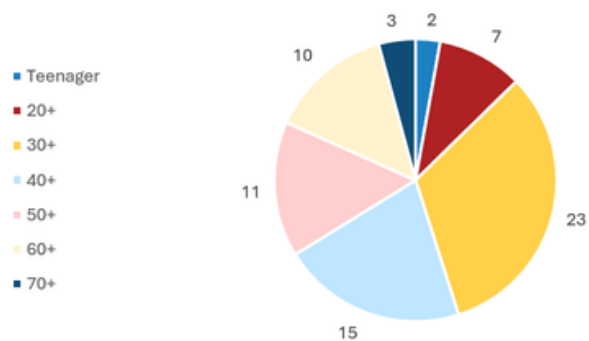
Role



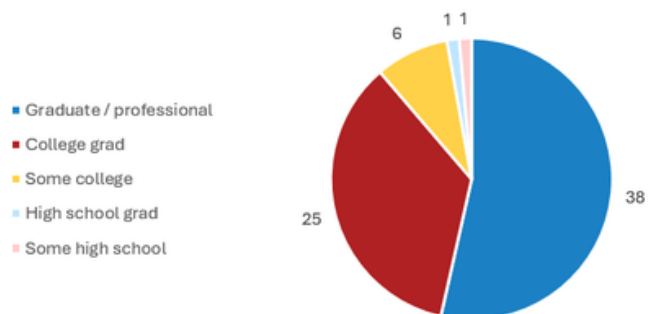
Gender



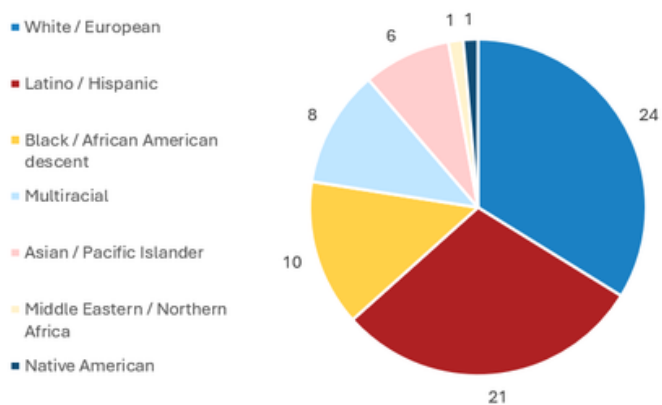
Age Groups



Education Level



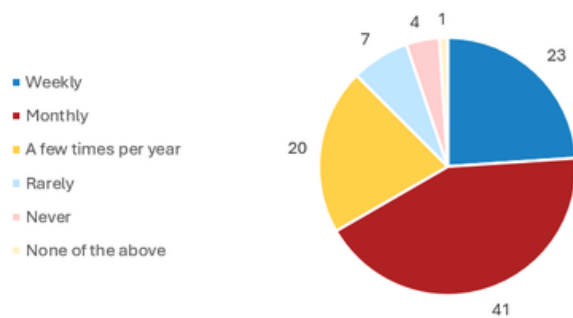
Race



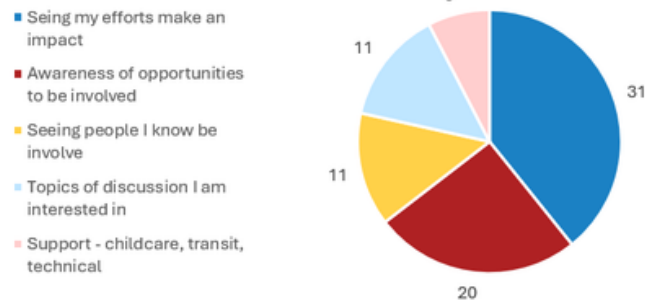
# Appendix B

## NYC Community Survey (96 responses, broadly evaluating community civic participation)

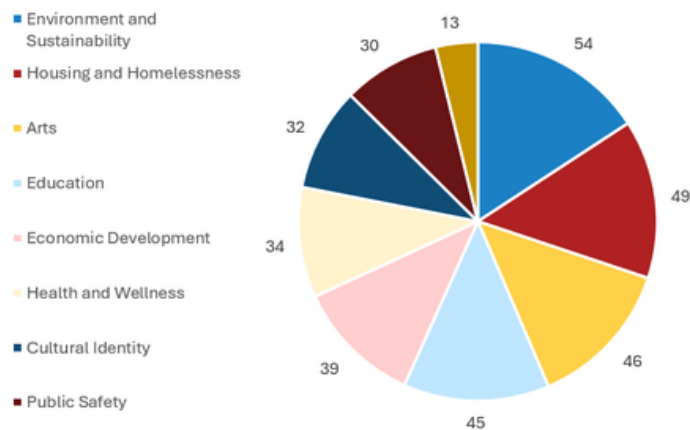
How often do you participate in community events?



What would encourage you to be more involved in your community?



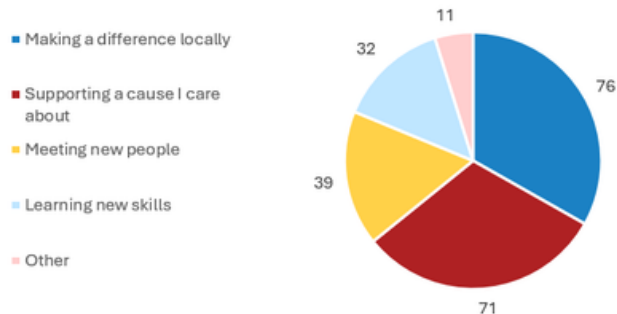
What issues or causes do you feel connected to in your community?



### Write-in Comments

- Religion
- Community-building, neighboring
- Immigration/immigrants
- biking and transportation
- Animal welfare
- Affordability
- community development
- immigrant rights, libraries, participatory democracy (PB)
- Transportation, safe streets
- Transitions
- Transportation
- Transportation

What motivates you to participate in your community?

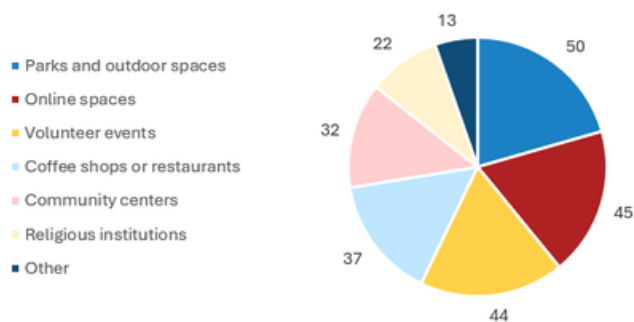


### Write-in Comments

- climate change
- Sense of responsibility
- Showing my kids what matters
- I believe that communities should influence change
- To Whom Much is Given Much is Expected And i Have Been Blessed With a Good Life and i Want to Give Back
- Being a role model for my children
- "What motivates me is knowing that I am leaving a legacy, protecting dignity, fairness, turning engagement into action, creating and building partnerships, given people a voice, voter engagement, tenant advocacy, and helping people find solutions. I am energized when I can connect residents with the right agency, person, or resource to solve a problem that has been frustrating them.

- I believe every resident deserves to be heard and respected regardless."
- Simply being in public, in a public space, where i can exist with others and where im not a target consumer or have my worth tied to my ability/willingness to spend money.

## Where do you typically meet with others in your community?

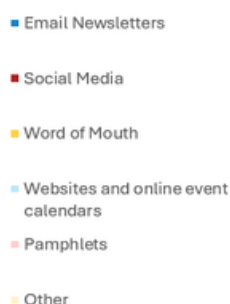


- A few other places for me are at Community Board 9, the 43rd PCT Community Council, Senior centers, Union engagements, National Night Out, Tenant meetings, Schools and educational events, Health fairs, Merchant corridors and local businesses, Government agency meetings, Neighborhood streets, communities parks, and community events, schools, faith-based organizations, local businesses, and neighborhood outreach activities.
- Non-profit group offices
- Campaigns

### Write-in Comments

- block association building
- NYC public housing
- Meetings organized for a purpose
- In my apartment building
- Friends homes.
- Arts spaces
- Mostly houses of worship
- Neighbors homes
- cultural workshops and festivals
- Knights of Columbus Meeting Space.
- Libraries; colleges & universities
- Community board
- Music venues

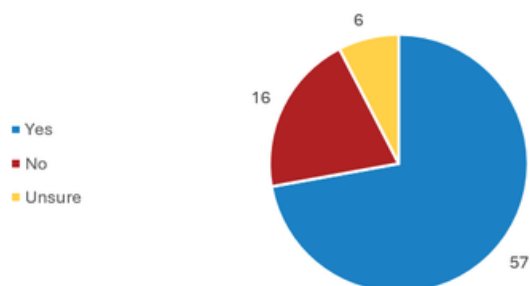
## Where do you regularly get information about community events?



### Write-in Comments

- group texts
- Flyers
- Flyers/posters at the local park
- Phone tree. Still a thing (ask your grandparents)
- Whatsapp groups
- I am on A Number of Boards in the Community. Also CB14 Gives a Weekly List of All Community Events
- Flyers
- Newspapers

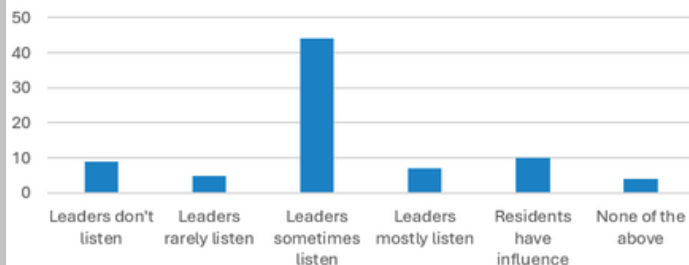
## In the past year, have you attended a public meeting?



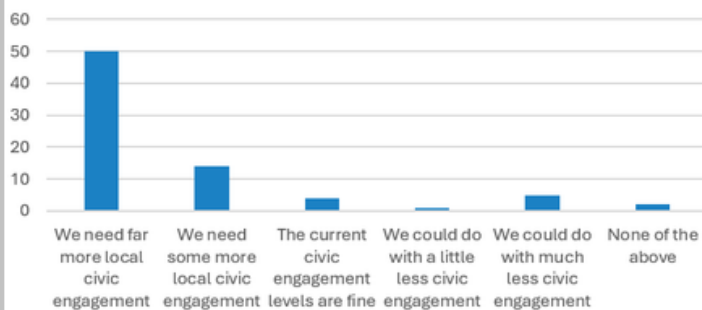
### Write-in Comments

- i am often too busy even though i add them to my calendar. i do a lot of other work that falls under "civics" and a lot of informal neighborhood community building which makes me feel less guilty.
- don't hear about them, or they're while i'm at work
- Not finding out in time; and public meetings (specifically hearings) tend to be very long and frustrating.
- Too busy
- Not sure
- I dont live in an area of the city that i feel connected to and/or feel reflects my values--and in fact runs counter to my values.

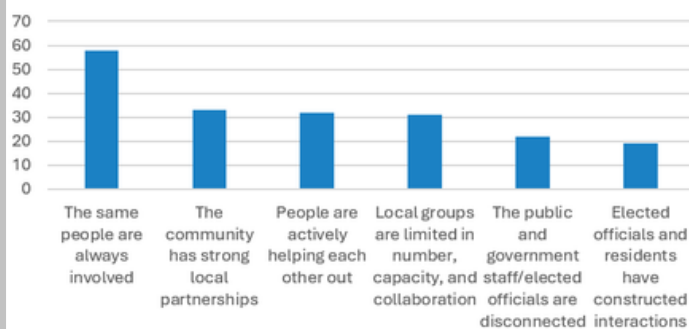
How would you rate your community when it comes to leaders' openness during the decision-making process?



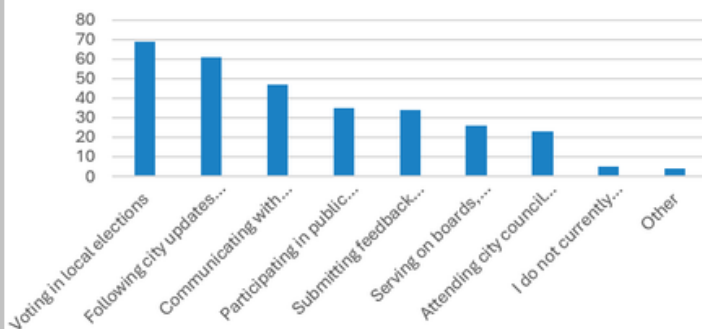
Which of these statements best reflects your opinion about local civic engagement?



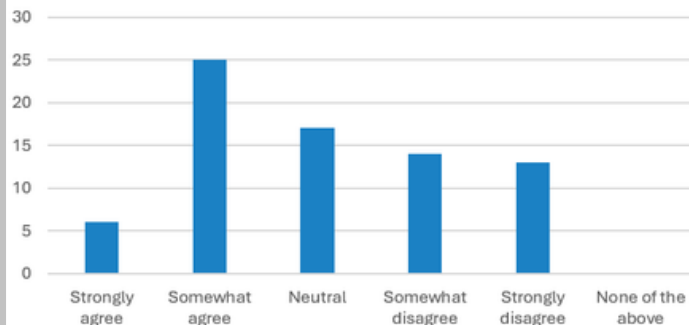
What are the civic relationships like in your community?



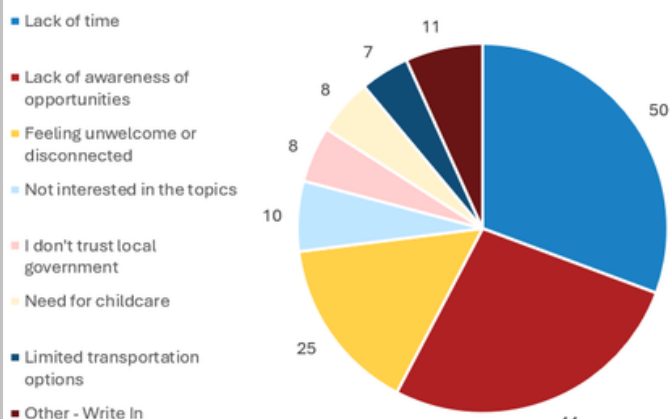
How do you currently engage with your local municipal government?



Do you feel your neighborhood has infrastructure that supports civic engagement?



## What barriers prevent you from engaging in community or civic initiatives?



### Write-in Comments

- Official channels feel dominated by longstanding cliques and controlled by/ prioritizing the needs of officials. The same people from the same groups are always dominating discussion. Community Boards (I am a former member) are dominated by reactionary, affluent, elderly, and white people who have been on for decades & know each other & elected officials much better than the communities they serve.
- unclear how participation will impact policy or funding
- Feels hopeless
- Scheduling; lack of disability accessibility
- I don't feel like some will make a difference
- I am very involved
- Too many meetings. I want fewer, more efficient meetings
- Government has predetermined outcomes e.g. ULURP rezoning process
- Hostility and negative behavior of other participants
- I am disheartened when I go because the rooms are largely 90+% ages 50+ (and more realistically 60+), and it feels that the generational gap in priorities is very misaligned.

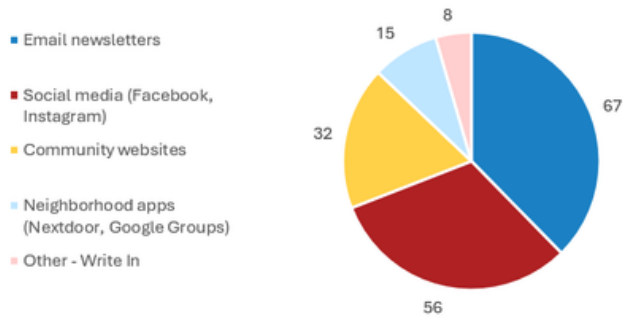
## What types of opportunities would you like to see when engaging with local municipal government?



### Write-in Comments

- landlord or buildings posting Community Board print outs in lobby. We should work with other agencies. Most new yorkers live in buildings Bring DOB into the conversation about how they can help with public engagement. Super can post this in the mailroom or mail area
- Simplified navigating of communication centers and websites
- Especially creative space making that invites intergenerational participation
- More inclusion of arts and culture as part of civic participation
- College Credits Given to volunteers
- Frankly, none of the above. I would like to see the local government execute with urgency in delivering to the public without getting bogged down in process
- Meetings only on things that actually matter
- Self-tape for public comment instead of having to go to a meeting in person
- I would love to see a future where local town hall/assembly fills the role that was previously filled by church for some communities. A standing meeting where both informal and formal updates are shared but it's local enough that the people involved are actually your neighbors (ie a few Election Districts only), where you have donuts on Sunday morning etc.

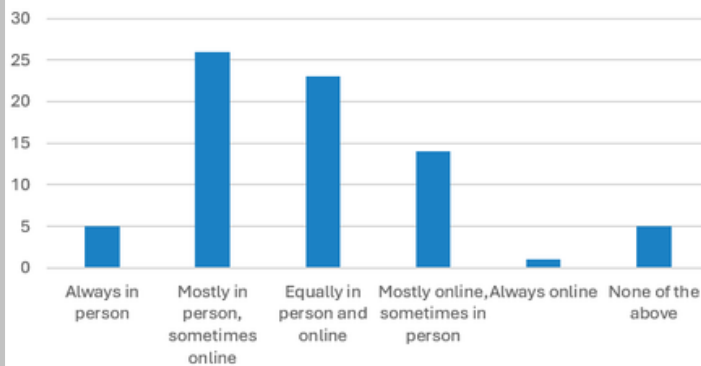
## What digital platforms do you use to stay informed about civic activities or events?



## Write-in Comments

- group texts
- None
- [evgrieve.com](https://www.evgrieve.com)
- Flyers/posters at the nearby park
- Digital platforms are not my main method.
- Personal connections
- Group chats
- group chats e.g. tenant union
- Flyers
- Word of mouth
- WhatsApp chats for local groups (like community garden)

## How do you attend events or meetings?



## What do you think of your neighborhood implementing digital participation tools?

