

Report - February 2024

50 Ideas for a Stronger and More Equitable Bronx

It will be nearly impossible to create a more equitable economy in New York without putting the Bronx at the forefront. This report presents bold policy ideas from 50 exceptional Bronxites for what city leaders can do to create a stronger, more equitable Bronx.

by the Center for an Urban Future

- The following is the introduction and full list of ideas from *50 Ideas for a Stronger and More Equitable Bronx.*
- Click here to explore the full report and read all of the practical and visionary ideas contributed by 50 exceptional Bronxites.

It will be nearly impossible to create a more equitable economy in New York without putting the Bronx at the forefront.

The Bronx is overflowing with opportunity. Since the pandemic, no other borough has experienced a bigger spike in new business formation, and many of these new entrepreneurs have clear potential for growth. Even accounting for the economic pullback during COVID-19, the Bronx has had a net gain of 57,000 jobs since 2000, double Manhattan's rate of growth. The MTA has broken ground on four new Metro-North stations, which are expected to speed commutes and bring development to neighborhoods; dozens of green infrastructure projects now underway will help protect the borough from the severe weather events brought on by climate change; and there are promising signs that development of the Kingsbridge Armory will finally move forward. The Bronx's first children's museum recently opened in a renovated former powerhouse, and the Hip Hop Museum is coming to the South Bronx in 2025. Moreover, the new reality of hybrid work—with many New Yorkers now commuting into Manhattan offices no more than three days a week—is creating new economic opportunities for neighborhoods outside the city's main business districts, including many across the Bronx.

Even as leaders across the borough have worked to build on the borough's many unique assets—including a promising spurt of new development and economic growth over the past decade, a diverse ecosystem of community-based organizations and

civic groups, and rich cultural vitality—far too many Bronxites still face grave affordability challenges, as well as gaps in access to health care, open space, technology, and financial services. And too many Bronx residents experience steep barriers to obtaining the well-paying jobs that are growing in today's economy.

There is already broad agreement that addressing the borough's biggest challenges, taking advantage of its many opportunities, and laying the foundation for a stronger and more equitable borough will require bold action and fresh ideas. However, there is much less understanding of what specific actions should be taken. This report aims to fill that gap.

The report—the first in a series of forthcoming reports by the Center for an Urban Future that set forth concrete ideas for bolstering each of the five boroughs—presents 50 bold policy ideas for what the Mayor, City Council members, the Bronx Borough President, and other city leaders can do to create a stronger, more equitable Bronx.

The 50 ideas in this report—a joint project between the Center for an Urban Future and The Bronx Community Foundation, the first and only community foundation in The Bronx, solely dedicated to delivering resources to the borough—all emanate from leaders across the Bronx. To generate fresh and achievable ideas for the borough's future, we turned to a diverse mix of 50 exceptional Bronxites. Those contributing an idea to the report include community advocates, social entrepreneurs, heads of social service nonprofits, business owners, 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 help more Bronx residents get on the path to the middle class, strengthen social infrastructure, address the affordability crisis, close longstanding racial and ethnic opportunity gaps, improve the health of residents, and bolster neighborhoods across the borough. This report contains ideas both practical and visionary.

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1. **Create a year-round career-connected learning program that builds on the success of SYEP**
   Michelle Avila, Health Chair, Bronx Community Board 7 and Assistant Director of Public Policy, Children's Aid
2. **Recalculate the area median income (AMI) to ensure that newly built "affordable" housing is actually in reach for most Bronx residents**
   Sheila Garcia, Yoselyn Gomez, and Joanne Grell, New Settlement and Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA)
3. **Create a digital equity plan for the Bronx**
   Jerelyn Rodriguez, Co-Founder and CEO, The Knowledge House
4. **Expand the Bronx People's Federal Credit Union from a mobile banking resource into a brick-and-mortar branch**
   Kerry A. McLean, Vice President of Community Development, WHEDco
5. **Adopt ideas from the grassroots Bronx-wide economic development plan developed by Bronx communities**
   Dariella Rodriguez, Director of Community Development, The Point
6. **Enable more of the Bronx's parks to become edible forests to combat food insecurity**
   David Shuffler, Executive Director, with Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice Staff
7. **Develop a multi-year plan to get every Bronx student to read on grade level**
   Sarah Johnson, CEO, Teaching Lab
8. **Improve the quality of life in the South Bronx by implementing the Mott Haven-Port Morris Waterfront Plan**
   Mychal Johnson, Founding Member and Advisory Board Member, South Bronx Unite
9. **Create a Bronx Training Hub to help more residents get into the workforce and advance into better**

paying jobs
Andre White, Executive Director and CEO, Phipps Neighborhoods

10. **Bolster the borough's many small nonprofits by streamlining the City Council's funding process for grants under $5,000**
Chrys Napolitano, President, Northeast Bronx Community Farmers Market Project
11. **Create a cross-cultural apprenticeship that pairs emerging immigrant artists with established Bronx-based artists**
Sandie Luna, Executive Director, ID Studio Theater Performance and Research Center
12. **Address the older adult housing crisis by turning under-used NYCHA apartments into shared living spaces for seniors**
Dr. Anderson Torres, President and CEO, R.A.I.N. Total Care
13. **Create a physical hub in the Bronx that helps connect local small businesses to existing assistance programs and resources**
Jessica Betancourt, Owner of Bronx Optical Center and President of BJT Bronx Merchant Association
14. **Boost the availability of mental health care for parents and guardians**
Emily Lopez, Senior Director for Community Leadership Development, Graham Windham
15. **Expand the city's free broadband initiative to all NYCHA developments in the Bronx**
Kathleen Carrasco, Borough Director for Bronx Neighborhood Library Networks, New York Public Library
16. **Cap the Cross Bronx Expressway and ensure surrounding communities will benefit**
Nilka Martell, Founder, Loving the Bronx
17. **Expand the window for households with newly earned income to retain benefits like affordable housing**
Christina Hanson, Executive Director, Part of the Solution
18. **Support mutual aid groups in providing legal services to new immigrants**
Terry Lawson, Co-Founder, Bronx Immigration Partnership
19. **Develop an international food market on Jerome Avenue to address food insecurity and bolster economic development in the West Bronx**
Fernando Tirado, Director of New Initiatives, Bronx District Public Health Office, NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene
20. **Integrate hands-on work experience into classroom learning at schools across the Bronx**
Lisa Sorin, President, Bronx Chamber of Commerce
21. **Set up accessible veteran centers in the four corners of the Bronx**
Amjad Mujaahid, Bronx Neighborhood and Veteran Services Health Promoter, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
22. **Create more small business co-working spaces in the Bronx to help small business owners overcome rent hurdles and language barriers**
Cristy Moya, Director for Bronx Women's Business Center, Business Outreach Center Network
23. **Create a free Very Important Bronx Kids (VIB Kids) card to provide free entry—and free transit access—to NYC museums and cultural institutions**
Maria Panora, Director, South Bronx Rising Together
24. **Expand NYPL's TechConnect program to offer digital literacy education in more languages**
Diya Basu-Sen, Executive Director, Sapna NYC
25. **Use zoning tools to encourage new developments in the Bronx to include health clinics and wellness centers**
Sandra Piggée, President, Bronx Community Health Network (BCHN)
26. **Establish and fund arts curriculum as a core subject in public schools to provide a gateway for students into viable careers in the arts**
Judith Insell, Executive Director, Bronx Arts Ensemble
27.

Improve the quality of jobs for the 75,000 Bronx residents working in direct care
Jodi Sturgeon, President and CEO, PHI

28. **Launch a major initiative to beautify the Bronx**
Yasmin Cruz, Executive Director, Westchester Square Business Improvement District
29. **Expand access to affordable internet for all Bronxites, not only NYCHA residents**
Nicole Carter, Director of Resident Services, Crotona Park West
30. **Encourage parents on public assistance to participate in their children's education by funding parent engagement**
Beverly Emers, Policy Associate at the Welfare Rights Initiative at Hunter College, in collaboration with the Economic Justice Project at CUNY LAW
31. **Help Bronx high school students navigate the college application process by creating a mandatory college prep course**
Roselyn Grullón, Co-Founder, Bronx Native
32. **Cap segments of the Cross Bronx Expressway with parks to improve public health across the borough**
Alexander Levine, Director and Co-Founder, Bronx One Policy Group
33. **Reduce barriers to creating more arts-oriented charter schools in the Bronx**
Flora Montes, Founder, Bronx Fashion Week
34. **Incentivize Bronx businesses to hire local high school students as interns**
David Noah, Founding Principal, Comp Sci High
35. **Increase the minimum wage to pull people out of the cycle of poverty**
Eileen Torres, Executive Director, BronxWorks
36. **Require digital literacy training for all city employees**
Natasha Green, CEO & Founder, Hidden Gems Archery and We Intervene
37. **Introduce a mandatory financial literacy course in every public high school**
Carlos Moreno, Co-Executive Director, Big Picture Learning
38. **Develop a year-long internship or work-study program for CUNY students in the Bronx**
Daisy Cocco De Filippis, President, Hostos Community College
39. **Provide stipends that help Bronx residents afford to enroll and persist in skills training programs**
Plinio Ayala, President & CEO, and Debbie Roman, New York Managing Director at Per Scholas
40. **Incentivize Bronx businesses to hire residents from their community**
Wilma Alonso, Executive Director, and Albert Dalipi, Director of Marketing, Communications & Outreach at the Fordham Road Business Improvement District
41. **Increase the number of waste bins across the Bronx, and boost the frequency of trash collection**
Anthony Ramirez II, Founder of Mainland Media, From The Bronx, and The Bronx Beer Hall
42. **Pilot a "Shoot Cameras Not Guns" program to channel young Bronx residents into film careers and reduce violence**
Rocky Bucano, Founder and Executive Director, The Hip Hop Museum
43. **Support paid internships for high school and college students in nonprofit organizations**
Klaudio Rodriguez, Executive Director, The Bronx Museum of the Arts
44. **Simplify the process for health professionals to refer patients to food pantries**
Judy Secon, Deputy Executive Director, New York Common Pantry
45. **Equip the Bronx office of the City Planning Department with a team of architects, urban planners, and developers to conceptualize major projects for the borough's future**
George Ranalli, Principal-In-Charge, George Ranalli Architect
46. **Require the city to fund a living wage for all workers on city-funded contracts**
Eric Rosenbaum, President & CEO, Project Renewal
47. **Build on the momentum of the Hip Hop Museum, and establish other institutions that celebrate the**

Bronx's unique place in history
Willy Rodriguez, Co-Founder and Executive Director, International Salsa Museum

48. **Make the borough's schools safer and more welcoming outside of normal school hours**
Artemis Diaz, Parent of two children and Co-Chair of the Parent Council of South Bronx Rising Together
49. **Launch a borough-wide vocational work-and-learn program in partnership with leading Bronx employers**
John Calvelli, Executive Vice President of Public Affairs, Wildlife Conservation Society
50. **Create a plan to expedite the clean-up of trash, abandoned cars, and high grass that mar too many Bronx roads and highways**
Stephanie Ehrlich, Executive Director, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

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Click here to read the full report diving into 50 practical and visionary ideas for the Bronx's future.

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50 Ideas for a Stronger and More Equitable Bronx is a publication of the Center for an Urban Future. Researched and written by Hannah Berman, Celia Bernhardt, Dorian Block, Jonathan Bowles, Ian Galinson, Sofia Groopman, Frances Macalimbon Hamed, Hannah Joseph, Melissa Lent, and Yvonne Scorcia. Edited by Sofia Groopman, Jonathan Bowles, Dorian Block, and Eric Raimondi. Designed by Stislow Design.

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