

FEBRUARY 2024

# 50 Ideas

Center *for an*  
Urban  
Future

For a **stronger**  
and **more equitable**

## Bronx

THE  
BRONX  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION  
BUILDING A BETTER BRONX



# Center *for an* Urban Future

**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 Scordia. Edited by Sofia Groopman, Jonathan Bowles, Dorian Block, and Eric Raimondi. Designed by Stislow Design.

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

**THE  
BRONX  
COMMUNITY  
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BUILDING A BETTER BRONX



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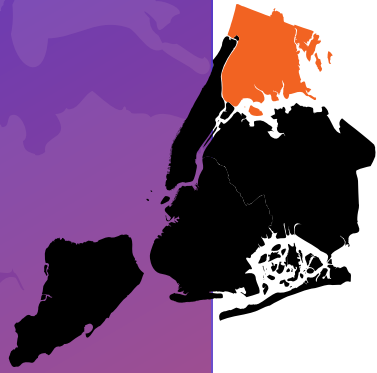
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# 50 Ideas

For a **stronger** and  
**more equitable Bronx**

<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
<b>Ideas Index</b> . . . . .	<b>3</b>
<b>50 Ideas</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>

# Introduction

**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.

# Foreword

The Bronx is a borough defined by possibility. It's a place where creativity thrives, where challenges inspire bold solutions, and where communities possess the wisdom and determination to shape their future. This report captures 50 innovative ideas born from the hearts and minds of those who know The Bronx best, offering a vision of what's possible when we invest in the talent and ingenuity that already exists here.

For decades, The Bronx has faced systemic barriers, but what this report demonstrates is that resilience and opportunity have always been at the core of our story. These ideas are a testament to the borough's ability to turn vision into action, driving transformative change from within.

Now is the moment to act—to see The Bronx not just for what it has endured, but for what it can achieve. Let this report inspire you to invest in these ideas, champion the leaders behind them, and embrace the boundless potential that defines this borough. Together, we can create a future that reflects the strength, creativity, and promise of The Bronx—a future built by and for its people.

Sincerely,  
**The Bronx Community Foundation**

# Ideas Index

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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



# **50 Ideas**

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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

It will be difficult to create a more equitable Bronx without putting a lot more of the borough's children and young adults on the path to economic success. Right now, a staggering 41 percent of children in the Bronx live in poverty, the highest rate in the city. Meanwhile, more than 20 percent of young adults in the Bronx are unemployed, higher than any other borough and roughly four times the city's overall unemployment rate. While bolstering the city's schools should be at the heart of any strategy to reverse these distressing trends, achieving the long-term progress that's needed won't be possible without combining educational investments with career-connected work opportunities that will prepare youth for future job pathways. The best opportunity is to build on the city's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). SYEP provides students with paid work experience, which is invaluable since paid, career-connected learning opportunities help young people invest in their future, earn wages for their basic needs, and keeps them from succumbing to gangs and gun violence. But SYEP could be so much more. Currently, the program offers employment for just six weeks during the summer and only begins to help young people build skills that will help prepare them for careers. The city's Department of Youth and Community Development should use SYEP as a launching pad for a more ambitious, year-round work-based learning program. It should survey students at the beginning of every school year and then offer work-based learning opportunities that align with their interests.

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## 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)

The Bronx is the epicenter of New York's affordable housing crisis. More than a third of Bronx renter households are severely rent-burdened (spending over half of their income toward housing), the highest of any borough. The Bronx also has the lowest net rental vacancy rate citywide and the highest rate of evictions. In recent years, rents have skyrocketed as thousands of people pushed out of other boroughs have moved to the Bronx. While rents in the Bronx are lower than any other borough, and new development projects with affordable components are underway, a significant share of Bronx residents still cannot afford those "affordable" units. The income required to live in these newly built units often surpasses the median income in the borough, in large part due to the misguided way the federal government calculates the Area Median Income (AMI) for these housing developments. Instead of accurately assessing the median income for those living in the Bronx, AMI is calculated based on an income measure for all of New York City and several suburban counties, and this inflated figure becomes the standard for affordability citywide. To ensure that affordable housing units are actually affordable for low-income Bronx residents, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development should calculate the true Bronx median income and use it for establishing new guidelines on how much affordable units should cost and what income is required. Doing so will prevent displacement and homelessness and the many other effects sparked by housing instability.

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### **3. Create a digital equity plan for the Bronx**

**Jerelyn Rodriguez, Co-Founder and CEO, The Knowledge House**

No other borough has greater barriers to digital inclusion than the Bronx. Nearly 40 percent of residents are unable to access a high-speed internet connection in their home and numerous Bronxites still lack laptops and other devices. Although the borough made real strides in distributing devices during the pandemic, there has been too little progress with another critical digital barrier: far too few Bronx residents have the digital skills to persist in tech job training programs that can launch them into well-paying careers. Changing this will be key to creating a more equitable Bronx. To get there, city officials should create and coordinate a digital inclusion plan for the Bronx. There are currently several entities working, mostly separately, on digital inclusion in the borough, whether in internet and device access, digital literacy programs, or training for tech-powered jobs—including The Bronx Digital Equity Coalition, CBOs teaching digital literacy, tech workforce development programs, and the U.S. Internet for All plan being implemented in the city. A digital inclusion plan driven by City Hall would ensure that all stakeholders work together on three pillars: expanding access to devices and internet access; teaching Bronx residents how to use these devices and the internet; and training those interested in joining the tech workforce. These stakeholders can work in tandem to create a cycle of digital inclusion powered by Bronx residents; for example, empowering residents to become the technicians installing broadband or teaching digital literacy in their communities.

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### **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**

The Bronx is one of the most underserved communities in the country in terms of banking. In 2017, a city survey found that almost 1 in 5 Bronx households did not have a bank account, nearly double the citywide average.<sup>1</sup> The result is that many Bronxites have little opportunity to build wealth. Access to deeply affordable savings and checkings accounts, capital, mortgages, and sound counsel regarding financial planning would allow Bronxites to expand and invest in their businesses, plan and save for their futures, and buy and improve their own homes. Traditional banks have long overlooked the Bronx, but there is an opportunity to properly establish and expand a Bronx People’s Federal Credit Union. Doing so would mean that Bronxites would finally get the financial services they so desperately need, and that money would stay within the community, reinvesting and contributing to growth and development. Local elected officials like Bronx Borough President Gibson should expand what is, as of now, a mobile banking branch, which moves throughout the borough but has no brick-and-mortar presence. Bronxites need multiple branches of this credit union, where they can go to conduct their business and come to know their bankers. By investing in the Credit Union, the city would be kickstarting an economic policy to reinvigorate the Bronx that is community-informed, neighborhood-led, and grounded in economic democracy.

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## 5. **Adopt ideas from the grassroots Bronx-wide economic development plan developed by Bronx communities**

Dariella Rodriguez, Director of Community Development, The Point

When large-scale investment has come to the Bronx in the past decade, profits are often prioritized over local needs and bold ideas that challenge the status quo are often deemed unrealistic. Community organizations are spending too much time fighting proposals, instead of having the time to initiate a proactive long-range plan rooted in local voices and transformative ideas. Over the past four years, a dozen leading Bronx organizations have come together, through a leadership committee and regular public meetings, gathering input from 50,000 people, to develop a grassroots Bronx-wide economic development plan. The plan includes bold projects like repurposing golf courses for farms, a new “people’s credit union,” a free Wi-Fi network in Hunts Point, a vision for the Kingsbridge Armory, and a call for the creation of an organization to support legacy marijuana dealers who want to start legal cannabis businesses in the Bronx. City Council members from the Bronx and the Borough President should adopt the Bronx-wide ideas outlined in the economic development plan, because they represent the most thought-through ideas of people who live in the Bronx and challenge norms that need challenging. Ignoring these projects will undermine the hard, consensus-building work that has been done across communities, and the borough will miss out on so many exciting opportunities for sustainable growth.

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## 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

Bronx residents experience the highest rate of food insecurity—36 percent—across the five boroughs.<sup>2</sup> The harsh truth is that Bronxites simply do not have adequate access to healthy and affordable food. Furthermore, a lack of healthy food choices negatively impacts the borough’s overall health. That the Bronx has higher rates of high blood pressure and diabetes than any other borough.<sup>3</sup> is a symptom of the prevalence of food insecurity and abundance of food deserts. As an attempt to begin to address these disparities, the Bronx River Alliance and various community-based organizations established the Bronx River Foodway, a pilot project within Concrete Plant Park where the community can use public land to grow and gather healthy food such as medicinal plants, fruits, kitchen herbs, and fresh vegetables. It is one of New York City’s only edible food forests, and its success represents an opportunity to harness more of the Bronx’s parks to give residents accessible, healthy food options. The city’s new Chief Public Realm Officer, Ya-Ting Liu, along with the Parks Department and food-based community-based organizations, should open up other foodways in Bronx parks so that residents can forage and plant. Additionally, these foodways can act as a platform to engage residents in healthy food and wellness workshops, cooking classes, and community gardening, offering them the knowledge they need to live healthier and more sustainable lifestyles.

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## **7. Develop a multi-year plan to get every Bronx student to read on grade level**

**Sarah Johnson, CEO, Teaching Lab**

It will be difficult to significantly expand economic prosperity for Bronx residents without helping a lot more of the borough's young people to read on grade level. In 2022, just 37 percent of Bronx residents were proficient in reading based on state test scores, notably lower than every other borough (Brooklyn was next, at 54 percent). In some Bronx schools, zero percent of kindergartners and first graders were reading on grade level, an indication that an alarming number of children in the borough fall behind at a very early age. Sadly, too many of them never catch up, a problem with tragic consequences since there's hardly a decent-paying job in today's economy that doesn't require proficiency in reading. To reverse this, the city should develop a multi-year plan to get every single student in the Bronx to read on grade level. This will require interventions that equip every teacher to be a literacy teacher, starting with an expansion of efforts to coach teachers in the Bronx on the soundest pedagogical techniques for teaching kids to read. Research has shown that coaching teachers has a transformative impact on student performance. While the Adams administration has admirably invested in coaching teachers, there are still significant gaps. In addition, city leaders should recruit tutors with experience helping kids with reading to become teachers and ensure that future teachers—those enrolled in CUNY education programs that prepare a large share of city teachers—are trained on the same proven reading pedagogies.

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## **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**

The South Bronx has one of the city's greatest concentrations of polluting facilities, including four power plants, waste transfer stations, home heating oil facilities, and numerous warehouses and factories that bring a steady stream of trucks. All this has contributed to significant environmental harm and dismal health outcomes for local residents, especially those living in Mott Haven and Port Morris. The two neighborhoods are oftentimes regarded as "asthma alley" due to having some of the highest rates of asthma in the country. Any effort to create a stronger and more equitable Bronx will need to include a sustained effort to improve the quality of life in these hard-hit neighborhoods. To start, city leaders should stop the cycle of placing contaminants in the South Bronx and instead invest in nature-based solutions like the Mott Haven-Port Morris Waterfront Plan. The plan has already been prioritized by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. And now, the city needs to produce and activate the plan by reallocating \$2.75 million from the New York City Department of Transportation to the New York City Economic Development Corporation. Implementing the Mott Haven-Port Morris Waterfront Plan would provide over 100,000 people with access to the previously inaccessible waterfront, create economic and educational opportunities for Bronx residents, and provide much-needed greenspace for filtering clean air and curbing the urban heat island effect.

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## 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

There is a cost-of-living crisis in New York that is especially acute in the Bronx. A staggering 65 percent of working-age Bronx households earn too little to put them above the true cost of living, a higher rate than any other borough, according to a 2023 report by United Way of New York City. A big reason for this is that too many Bronx residents are either unemployed or working in low-wage jobs. To solve this problem, city leaders will need to invest in training programs that help Bronx residents get into the workforce and advance into better-paying jobs. Specifically, they should fund a Bronx Training Hub. This would be a partnership between nonprofits and community colleges in the Bronx where participants would take sector-specific trainings at community colleges, and nonprofits would then oversee their job application processes. It would run on a cohort model and provide participants with a stipend to support them in taking time out of the workforce to focus on a future career. To further support program participants, the Bronx Training Hub would create a job matching platform, possibly one that uses AI to scan resumes and determine what jobs are the best fit for a candidate depending on skillset and job history. The ultimate goal would be to place thousands of unemployed or underemployed Bronx residents in decent paying jobs, thereby boosting incomes and helping more people in the city's poorest borough to make ends meet.

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## 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

Every year, the City Council provides discretionary funding to local non-profit organizations that provide necessary services to supplement government programs. In the Bronx, where more than a quarter of residents live in poverty, these organizations do especially vital work. This funding is essential for many of the small organizations that support Bronxites in need, but the money can often get tied up in byzantine bureaucratic processes. As a result, many leaders of community-based organizations find themselves spending personal funds while they wait to be reimbursed by city agencies. These overtaxed community leaders rightly devote their time and resources to ensuring that those in need receive support rather than following up with the City Council, meaning that sometimes they never see the money at all. To make it easier for smaller organizations with less capacity to tap into these funds and continue serving their communities, the City Council should restructure its processes to streamline grant requests for less than \$5,000. Firstly, they should create a separate application for organizations requesting under \$5,000. In addition, for these smaller grants, the money should be provided in anticipation of its use, with the understanding that the nonprofit will then submit a detailed follow-up report. To ensure organizations do so in a timely manner, they will be required to submit their reports before receiving any further funding. A more streamlined process to apply for and receive funding from the City Council will enable these organizations to continue their critical work of support.

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## **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

Artists who are recent immigrants to this country must often put their artistic endeavors on hold to navigate the cultural, emotional, and practical stressors of their new lives. Thirty-five percent of Bronx residents are immigrants, and many of them are aspiring or transplanted artists who have put their careers on pause. To tap into this talent and facilitate cross-cultural collaboration, Bronx Borough President Gibson should create and fund a program to bring together established Bronx-based artists with emerging artists who are recent immigrants to the borough, regardless of documentation status. This program would pair up artists for a two-month period, providing a stipend over the course of their collaboration so that they would have the freedom to shadow one another and develop life- and art-based skills. The program would also offer quarterly professional development workshops for all the artists and legal clinics for immigrants. Pairing up artists across cultural divides would facilitate an exchange of ideas, help create a multicultural artistic community, and broaden cultural understanding. It would also work to fight inequity by providing people who start at a disadvantage in the art world with the necessary funding, skills, and connections. Artists are the visionaries who see what is possible before it seems conceivable, yet, every day, some of the collective voice and vision of immigrant artists is lost to the necessity of survival. This program would help prevent that loss and bring us closer to what is possible in the Bronx.

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## **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

Access to affordable housing is one of the key elements of an equitable economy, but for many Bronx older adults, a safe, accessible, and economical place to live is hard to come by. The reality is that a substantial number of older adults live in public housing. One in every four NYCHA residents is 62 or older, and 42 percent of NYCHA households are headed by persons in this age group. But many of the Bronx's 90,000 NYCHA residents<sup>4</sup> include older adults with a disability who live in walk-ups that were built prior to the American Disabilities Act. Indeed, overall, 70 percent of NYCHA units have at least one set of stairs residents must climb.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, some older adults cannot access affordable housing at all due to short supply. As a result, the city projects the number of older adults in homeless shelters will triple by 2030.<sup>6</sup> Still, there is a unique opportunity to utilize current living space that are not fully inhabited. Many older adults live alone in units with more than one bedroom. NYCHA should match other older adults to these larger units and create shared living spaces. This matching service would mean that more older adults would have an affordable place to live, older adults with disabilities could be paired with a building with an elevator, and people who were previously living alone would now enjoy the company of their peers.



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### **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

The success of small businesses from Jerome Avenue to Southern Boulevard will be crucial to closing the wealth gap in the Bronx and creating jobs across the borough. Helping more of the borough's great small businesses become stronger, bigger, and more competitive will require increasing access to capital. Earlier this year, Mayor Adams launched a groundbreaking program that does just that, the NYC Small Business Opportunity Fund. Specifically aimed at helping small businesses that are underserved by traditional financial relief programs, the program offers low-interest loans of up to \$250,000. Unfortunately, many eligible Bronx-based entrepreneurs have struggled to complete the required paperwork. The forms and questions that constitute the loan applications are complex and especially difficult to complete for those for whom English is not a first language. Without guidance, these business owners file incomplete forms, jeopardizing their ability to receive funding. Although the Bronx has several highly regarded small business assistance organizations that are well-positioned to help local entrepreneurs overcome these challenges, many Bronx business owners aren't aware of these services. To address this problem and provide a much-needed boost to entrepreneurs across the Bronx, the city's Department of Small Business Services should establish a dedicated hub in the borough that connects entrepreneurs to existing resources. In-person information desks staffed by multi-lingual outreach specialists would spread awareness of these vital services, helping Bronx entrepreneurs complete loan paperwork properly and receive city funding. This much-needed hub would allow businesses to make necessary capital improvements and expansions, boosting the borough's economy.

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### **14. Boost the availability of mental health care for parents and guardians**

Emily Lopez, Senior Director for Community Leadership Development, Graham Windham

The Bronx has the highest prevalence of serious psychological distress of any borough, with especially troubling rates in the South Bronx. Despite this, there is a staggering lack of mental health support for Bronx residents. While there have been some strides in advancing mental health service support for Bronx children and adolescents through schools, in-patient and out-patient services, and the city's expansion of Family Enrichment Centers, there remains a troubling lack of support for Bronx adults. This gap in services makes it difficult for Bronx adults to lead productive lives for themselves and their families. Oftentimes private support is unaffordable, and mental health providers that are available fail to provide culturally competent care. To make the most of the city's focus on youth mental health, Mayor Adams should mandate that all city government programs providing mental health support to children, youth, and families also provide support to their caregivers. While it's important to provide support to children and adolescents, when parents or caregivers are mentally unwell, it is detrimental to the entire family. Mandating support for parents will lead to healthier families.



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## **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**

The Bronx has the lowest overall broadband internet access of any borough,<sup>7</sup> and is home to three of the six community boards in New York City where more than 40 percent of residents lack broadband access.<sup>8</sup> In today’s digital age, this alarming broadband gap disadvantages Bronx residents in multiple ways. To remedy this, Bronx Borough President Gibson and Mayor Adams should establish a Digital Inclusion Initiative that would bridge the digital divide in the Bronx by providing technology access to residents with lower incomes. The city has already launched free high-speed broadband and basic cable TV to select NYCHA developments through its Big Apple Connect program, including 14 developments in the Bronx. Expanding to all 50+ NYCHA developments in the Bronx through this new Digital Inclusion Initiative would build on this critical, overdue work. In addition, the city should subsidize free or low-cost broadband internet access for people with low incomes outside of NYCHA developments through a city partnership with internet service providers. The city should also work with libraries to offer additional training programs and resources to help residents develop digital literacy skills, including training on using technology, online safety, and cybersecurity. And the city should provide devices to Bronx residents, such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones, and digital resources and content, including e-books and online learning resources through this initiative. Through this multi-pronged approach, the city can help ensure that Bronx residents have access to the resources and tools they need to succeed in today’s digital world.

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## **16. Cap the Cross Bronx Expressway and ensure surrounding communities will benefit**

**Nilka Martell, Founder, Loving the Bronx**

The Cross Bronx Expressway is one of the most-trafficked stretches of highway in the U.S., and also one of the most harmful. The highway has damaged the health of generations of Bronx residents living in the neighborhoods that surround it. Pollution from car exhaust and tire wear has contributed to the South Bronx having one of the nation’s highest rates of death and disease from asthma. There is now an enormous opportunity to begin to mitigate these impacts. The federal government is in the middle of a two-year feasibility study to consider capping the sections of the expressway that are below grade. Capping or covering the two miles of expressway that are trenched would reconnect neighborhoods, reduce air and noise pollution, create two miles of desperately needed green space on the newly created space above the highway, and invite economic investment. A study by a group of doctors and public health experts at Columbia University demonstrated that the project would pay for itself over time, just in saved health care costs. Mayor Adams, City Council members, and Bronx Borough President Gibson should publicly back this federal project, and simultaneously develop a plan for keeping the area affordable to those who live there, so that they can benefit from the project once it is completed. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to deliver justice to the communities who have suffered from the effects of living adjacent to the highway, and to protect future generations from similar outcomes.

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## 17. Expand the window for households with newly earned income to retain benefits like affordable housing

Christina Hanson, Executive Director, Part of the Solution

While an alarming number of New Yorkers are struggling with housing insecurity today, the problem is most acute in the Bronx, which has the highest rate of evictions and homelessness in the city. Access to affordable housing immediately improves the economic possibilities of the most vulnerable of New Yorkers, allowing them a significant reduction in poverty, better food security, and the prospect of upward social mobility. Indeed, the households we see with the most stability and resources to meet new goals live in affordable housing, a commodity that is too rare and declining in the borough. But changes are needed to make access to affordable housing more equitable, beginning with eligibility requirements for city benefits. The Human Resources Administration should establish a prolonged window for households with newly earned income to keep their benefits within the Family Homelessness & Eviction Prevention Supplement to allow recipients to retain their housing while they transition to greater stability. Because of strict eligibility guidelines for public benefits, recipients frequently find themselves having to choose between getting a job and keeping their benefits. Since the work they are able to find is often not enough to pay market rate rents and keep food on the table, the system discourages them from relinquishing public assistance—when a sustainable pathway towards the stability of their families requires both income and public assistance..

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## 18. Support mutual aid groups in providing legal services to new immigrants

Terry Lawson, Co-Founder, Bronx Immigration Partnership

Immigrants account for 34 percent of all residents in the Bronx, and many of them struggle to access information about how to navigate the immigration and family law systems in the United States. With relatively few places in the borough to access affordable legal advice, many fall victim to a common scam where individuals known as “notarios” represent themselves as lawyers but have no qualifications to practice law. This commonly leads to misfiled legal documents and missed deadlines, often leading to severe consequences and thousands of lost dollars. Fortunately, a growing number of informally organized community and mutual aid groups have established operations in the Bronx, offering authentic and well-informed legal advice to the borough’s immigrants. The problem is that most of these young organizations—including one group working with African migrants that sees 100 people a day and others run by Latin American asylum seekers trying to teach their peers—do not have public funding, cannot afford to hire full-time attorneys, and struggle to meet the growing demand. The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs should create a fund to support these organizations. Doing so would help ensure that more of the borough’s vulnerable immigrants turn to trusted experts instead of unqualified notarios. In addition to funding, the city should offer groups a hotline to call with legal questions or a weekly visiting attorney or paralegal, and help the organizations register to earn 501c3 status.

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## **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

Few parts of the city have struggled more in recent years than the West Bronx. Its residents were among the hardest hit by pandemic-induced job losses, and the area also suffers from a great deal of food insecurity. As a result, children have a high risk of developing chronic diseases, disabilities, and early mortality. To address longstanding inequities in these neighborhoods, city leaders should invest in their local economies and the health and well-being of their residents. There is a tremendous opportunity to do so in the creation of an international food market on Jerome Avenue, the area's major thoroughfare. A hybrid public market and food hub would provide healthy, affordable, and culturally relevant foods, along with new, attainable employment and micro-entrepreneurship opportunities. The market would also address food insecurity and the prevalence of diet-related diseases. Furthermore, it could become an integral part of the city's food system by housing initiatives such as aquaponic and hydroponic facilities to grow locally sourced specialty foods, rooftop gardens and apiaries to produce honey in the Bronx, green roofs with rain gardens, commercial and teaching kitchens, a food business incubator, and an emergency food or food assistance program distribution site. The New York City Economic Development Corporation, which has erected other similar markets, should build a public-private partnership with food advocates, neighborhood residents, and the Burnside-Jerome-Tremont BID to develop this practical yet innovative anchor institution which would be an important step toward neighborhood stabilization, and social and economic resilience.

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## **20. Integrate hands-on work experience into classroom learning at schools across the Bronx**

Lisa Sorin, President, Bronx Chamber of Commerce

Far too few Bronx residents have been able to obtain the well-paying jobs being created in today's economy, leaving hundreds of thousands stuck in low-wage positions that offer little room for upward mobility. The result is that workers from the Bronx have the lowest average wages of any borough. There are many reasons for these economic inequities, but one key problem is that too few schools in the borough provide young people with early exposure to careers and offer opportunities to supplement academic skills with workplace learning. To meet this challenge, and better prepare young Bronxites for the careers of today and tomorrow, city leaders should take a series of steps to integrate traditional classroom learning with hands-on work experience. First, in schools across the Bronx, the city should pilot and then scale braided learning, an educational approach that merges high-quality work-based learning experiences with traditional academic pathways. It should then reinforce this integrated educational model with a structured internship program for middle school and high school students, giving young people valuable work experience. In addition to these important educational changes, city leaders should help create sustained workforce opportunities for Bronx residents by mandating local hiring for businesses in the Bronx and expanding pipelines for Bronx residents into government jobs. Taken together, these efforts would allow Bronx residents to access well-paying jobs, amass wealth, and envision careers with measured milestones.

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## 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

The Bronx is home to over 25,000 veterans, but the sad reality is that these brave men and women experience high rates of economic hardship. In New York City, one in ten veterans lives below the poverty line.<sup>9</sup> Many of our borough's veterans require vital services such as career counseling, pathways to pursue higher education, support for disabilities, free legal aid, food assistance, stable housing, and more, to improve their quality of life and gain economic mobility. But there is just one city-run center in the Bronx that provides these services for veterans, the Bronx Human Resources Administration office in Hunts Point, and veteran-specific resources are only available on Mondays and Tuesdays from 10-4 p.m. Furthermore, for veterans with disabilities, the office is not entirely accessible, as you must cross an active highway after exiting the subway to reach the building. To increase access to much-needed resources for veterans in poverty, the City Council's Veterans Committee should work closely with the Department of Veterans' Services to build and fund two fully-staffed, accessible centers in the north and south of the Bronx, near public transportation, where veterans and their families can receive the benefits for which they are qualified and that will help them move out of poverty.

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## 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

Increasing the number of co-working spaces in the Bronx will help local businesses thrive by offering community resources, networking opportunities, and low-rent alternatives to full storefronts. New and existing small business owners in the Bronx are struggling to keep up with increasing storefront rent costs. High rents are barriers to entry for entrepreneurs, and they make it challenging for existing business owners to cover overhead costs. Increased access to co-working spaces will provide temporary or permanent office locations for businesses that don't require a full storefront or that cannot afford one. For many, access to space will mean the difference between starting a business or being barred from entry due to the upfront costs. Furthermore, co-working offices can also provide a community space where business owners can share ideas and knowledge. Many Bronxites struggle to fill out new or minority/women-owned-business business applications and certifications, as English is not their first or primary language. Those struggling with paperwork would be able to receive help from other business owners who have successfully received funding. To make this a reality, the Department of Small Business Services should dedicate more grant and loan programs to help fund the upfront costs of co-working offices. Ultimately, facilitating resource-sharing and reducing overhead expenses will lead business owners to be more efficient and creative, and our whole borough will be richer for it.

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## **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**

New York City is filled with exciting opportunities for outside-of-the-classroom learning, including the Bronx Zoo, the New York Hall of Science, National Museum of Mathematics, New York Botanical Garden, and American Museum of Natural History. Exposure to enrichment programs like these can make a difference in educational outcomes, yet kids in the Bronx rarely are able to take advantage of them because of financial barriers. The city should promote educational success for Bronx students by funding access to enrichment outside of school in the form of a Very Important Bronx Kids (VIB Kids) program. This program would make transportation and access to various institutions like museums free for all students enrolled in Bronx public schools. Currently, student MetroCards only allow enrolled students into the subway Monday through Friday during key transit hours; this program would make free student travel available on the weekends as well, to remove a large barrier many parents feel keeps them from exploring opportunities in the city with their children. The program would also entail appointing a Family Program Coordinator to track usage of the VIB Kids program and run awareness events, ensuring that the program is reaching parents all across the Bronx. Giving students access to out-of-the-classroom learning will help them understand the richness of the resources within their own communities, and is therefore an investment in the next generation.

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## **24. Expand NYPL's TechConnect program to offer digital literacy education in more languages**

**Diya Basu-Sen, Executive Director, Sapna NYC**

Of all the boroughs, the Bronx lags the furthest behind in terms of digital access and literacy. While the TechConnect program, run out of the New York Public Library (NYPL) system, aims to provide New Yorkers with foundational digital education and even does so occasionally in Spanish, it is unable to meet the vast needs of the borough's increasingly diverse communities. The City Council should scale up the program so that courses are easily available in the many languages Bronx residents speak. To meet the demand and to make these programs linguistically accessible, the City Council should dedicate funds for partnerships between libraries and community-based organizations that can deliver additional courses out of local branches. These collaborative programs would leverage the deep roots CBO's have while increasing access to all the resources the NYPL can offer. Furthermore, these digital literacy programs should add classes that address practical needs for modern-day life, such as applying for benefits, attending telehealth appointments, and using google maps. Finally, individuals should be able to donate used electronics to libraries so that people who complete these courses and do not have access to computers at home may receive pre-used but perfectly functional computers and smartphones. Bronx residents will forever be left behind if they cannot access the vast resources that exist in the digital space—a more connected borough is the quickest path to a more equitable Bronx, and making libraries a better-funded hub of technological education and resources is the answer.

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## 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)

The Bronx has some of the worst health outcomes in the city, including asthma rates that are among the highest in the country, diabetes rates that are the highest in the state, and concerning hospitalization rates for mental illness. But despite these and other alarming public health challenges, the borough has surprisingly few resources that promote health and well-being, from urgent care clinics and stores with affordable, fresh produce to public green spaces. As the borough continues to swell with new development, including around the four new Metro-North stations set to be built, city leaders should do more to ensure that community health resources are expanded and accessible. Building on previous health-oriented zoning laws like the FRESH program, NYC's Department of City Planning can integrate new incentives into city zoning that encourage healthy living in new developments. With each new residential construction, a reformed zoning law would require the inclusion of a health clinic or wellness center with programming that supports determinants of health, such as nutrition or mental health services. These new facilities would provide the resources needed to create a stronger borough, fostering healthier habits like plant-based eating and routine physical exercise.

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## 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

Arts education empowers young people with the skills to pursue careers in the arts and the broader creative sector, which is a vital part of New York City's economy. Unfortunately, city government has underestimated the need to establish arts education as core curriculum and long underfunded it in public schools, a practice that has particularly disadvantaged young people in the Bronx. Affluent neighborhoods typically use donations from parent groups to supplement city dollars to pay for arts education programming, often leaving schools in Bronx lower-income communities with little or no arts education. About 17 percent of the city's public schools do not have a certified part-time or full-time arts teacher, greatly contributing to low levels of diversity in New York City's creative sector. To change this, Mayor Adams should establish and fund arts education as a core curriculum element in all public schools, at all grade levels, piloting this effort throughout the entire Bronx public school system. Doing so would expose Bronx students to visual art, music, theater, and dance, highlighting the arts as a viable career pathway, especially benefiting neurodivergent & special needs students in the Bronx. This Bronx pilot would supply thousands of young people with the skill sets to pursue the path to promising careers in the arts, contributing to creating a more equitable and inclusive arts industry sector in New York City.

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## **27. Improve the quality of jobs for the 75,000 Bronx residents working in direct care**

Jodi Sturgeon, President and CEO, PHI

A staggering 75,000 direct care workers live in the Bronx, more than any other borough. But this large and growing segment of the Bronx's workforce—including home health aides, personal care aides, and nursing assistants—is struggling in ways that are unsustainable. Care workers earn among the lowest wages of any industry, despite working long shifts and performing some of the most demanding jobs. They also have inadequate childcare, are not provided with adequate training, and have limited opportunity for advancement. Improving the quality of these jobs should be a massive priority for policymakers in the Bronx and citywide. Doing so will provide greater financial security for Bronx residents and strengthen New York's economy. Indeed, countless New Yorkers rely on these workers to care for elderly parents, young children, and others needing direct care. And with New York's population aging rapidly, the city will need to attract thousands more to this profession. To ensure an adequate supply of properly trained and appropriately compensated direct care workers, system-level policy change is needed by federal, state, and local government. The state's Master Plan on Aging is an opportunity to set a new standard for training direct care workers. In the city, Mayor Adams should pressure the state to ensure that direct care workers are paid a living wage. As evidenced in other states, a wage pass-through—and corresponding mandated reimbursement rate to providers—along with contracting standards mandating higher wages would improve financial security for countless Bronx residents.

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## **28. Launch a major initiative to beautify the Bronx**

Yasmin Cruz, Executive Director, Westchester Square Business Improvement District

The median rent of an apartment in Manhattan recently hit a record high of almost \$4200 a month, leading an increasing number of New Yorkers to consider living in the much more affordable Bronx.<sup>10</sup> But what do these potential new residents see as they enter the borough? Graffiti under the bridge on Bruckner Boulevard and litter all over the streets. The Bronx's appearance not only renders the borough undesirable to outsiders, but also makes community members feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods. Indeed, studies have shown clean streets discourage criminal activity.<sup>11</sup> On this score, the Bronx certainly has a way to go. To fix this problem, Bronx Borough President Gibson should spearhead a large-scale project to beautify the Bronx. This initiative would entail identifying leaders in different neighborhoods who can speak to the resources that their particular community needs and then empowering those community leaders to implement the clean-up. This beautification would, of course, extend beyond just ridding the streets of trash. The project would be about the creation of intentional, communal space. For example, community members might turn graffiti-filled walls into mural sites, discouraging vandalism and allowing Bronx citizens to take pride in their borough's unique relationship to art. Designing the beautification program so that each neighborhood can self-determine will ensure maximum impact and an equitable allocation of resources. Overall, if the Bronx is cleaned and beautified, it will become a more desirable place to call home and will ultimately see widespread economic improvement.



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## 29. Expand access to affordable internet for all Bronxites, not only NYCHA residents

Nicole Carter, Director of Resident Services, Crotona Park West

The Bronx has the lowest level of Broadband adoption of any borough, with just 38 percent of residents having internet access at home<sup>12</sup>. This digital divide is unacceptable at a time when access to the internet is fundamental to so many aspects of life in the Bronx, whether for students to complete homework assignments, the unemployed to apply for jobs, or newly-arrived immigrants to services. New York City has made some progress through its Big Apple Connect program, which is bringing free, in-home, high-speed internet to 300,000 NYCHA residents across the city. However, NYCHA houses less than 10 percent of Bronx residents. The majority of Bronxites live in subsidized and rent-regulated buildings and spend the majority of their income on rent. They should not have to choose between paying for food, housing, or internet access. Mayor Adams should partner with telecommunication providers to expand internet access to low-income Bronx residents by tapping community organizations to enroll more people in the federal Affordable Connectivity Program which offers a \$30 discount on monthly internet access, by expanding LinkNYC, which brings free, Wi-Fi to public spaces, and by further subsidizing the cost of broadband.

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## 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

Parent engagement in schools is a proven way to boost academic success and increase high school graduation rates, but it also serves another lesser-known purpose. When parents learn how to engage in their children's schools and take on leadership roles they develop soft skills like effective communication, teamwork, and critical thinking. Learning these skills can help them seek higher education or obtain jobs that come with benefits, flexibility, and higher wages, which lead to upward mobility. However, actively participating in their children's education while struggling to provide clothing, food, and shelter, and navigate the city's labyrinthine public assistance system, is an unrealistic goal for many. This is a burden which disproportionately falls on women. The Bronx has the highest poverty rate in the city, and this lack of engagement only reinforces the cycle from generation to generation. To solve this problem, the city should directly pay parents and facilitate parent engagement. As a part of this engagement, select parents could shadow staff members according to their interests. In addition, parental engagement should fulfill back-to-work requirements for public assistance including the Temporary Aid to Needy Families Program (TANF) and through Human Resources Administration (HRA). In addition, the city can improve city outcomes by enhancing Parent University, an underutilized NYC DOE website, which could become a rich archive of resources and courses geared towards higher education, job training, and social and emotional learning for the entire family.



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### **31. Help Bronx high school students navigate the college application process by creating a mandatory college prep course**

Roselyn Grullón, Co-Founder, Bronx Native

The Bronx still lags behind the rest of New York City in college enrollment, a major problem since a growing share of well-paying jobs in every industry today go to applicants with a college credential. Though the number of Bronx residents graduating high school has been on the rise, many of these grads either delay enrolling in college or never submit an application. This isn't because of a lack of talent or ambition. Rather, it's due to a dearth of resources available to help Bronx high schoolers navigate the complex world of college applications. To combat this notable absence of support, the Department of Education should implement a required college prep class in all New York City public schools. As part of this course, students would be exposed to the ins and outs of the college application process. To pass it, they would be required to apply to at least one college or university and attend special college fairs hosted by different CUNY campuses, funded by DOE. The class would also include explicit instruction on how to fill out the complicated Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application, as financial burden is the most significant barrier to entry for many Bronx students. Creating a mandatory college prep class would even the admissions playing field, allowing public school students to compete with private and parochial school students who often have access to similar courses. This program would pave the way for more students to achieve college and career success.

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### **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

The Bronx has the highest asthma rate of any borough in New York City, with 12.4 percent of the population suffering from the disease, more than 3 percentage points higher than the city-wide average.<sup>13</sup> Heartbreakingly, the statistics are even worse for children, with 17.4 percent of Bronx residents under 12 living with asthma, compared with the city-wide average of 12.4 percent.<sup>14</sup> Heavy traffic is a crucial factor here. The South Bronx, where childhood hospitalization rates due to asthma are particularly high, is triangulated by three expressways: Major Deegan, Bruckner, and Cross Bronx.<sup>15</sup> Heavy haul, highly pollutive trucks frequent these expressways, even as they often have no business in the Bronx itself. The solution is clear. To ensure the well-being of future generations of Bronxites, the borough needs fewer exposed highways and more green space. Parts of the Cross Bronx Expressway should be ensconced in parks to reduce pollution. Furthermore, due to the varying topographical grade levels across the Bronx, other areas of the Expressway could also be relatively cheaply tunneled, which would mean less artificial grade change than adding parkland. A feasibility study for this plan is already in the works, thanks to \$2 million of funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, which was funneled into NYC's Department of Transportation. For the study to lead to actual improvement, continuous city government support is vital. Mayor Adams and Brooklyn Borough President Gibson must ensure this is done; only then will our borough's youngest and most vulnerable residents thrive.

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### 33. Reduce barriers to creating more arts-oriented charter schools in the Bronx

Flora Montes, Founder, Bronx Fashion Week

The educational opportunities afforded to students in the Bronx are categorically worse than the options available in other more affluent areas because of the systemic disenfranchisement of people of color and lower socioeconomic status. This problem is particularly acute in the South Bronx, where, in one district, in 2021, the graduation rate was a disappointing 73 percent, and only 10 percent of 7th graders earned proficient scores on a standardized math assessment.<sup>16</sup> In the South Bronx, the reality is that the chance to get a good education often comes down to the number your child draws in a charter school lottery system. Children in the Bronx deserve to have more choices about where they go to school—and those choices must be of a higher quality. In particular, the borough needs more arts-oriented charter schools so that children can benefit from educational environments that nurture their talents and spark their creativity, encouraging them to stay in school. The City Council should work to make the process of founding charter schools easier to navigate and provide more funding for these schools. Arts-focused charter schools with smaller class sizes and more explicit specialization provide students opportunities to pursue passions outside of the realm of classical book smarts. South Bronx students already possess many talents, from music to fashion to the fine arts. Creating dedicated schools where they would be able to cultivate these talents would help all students move through the school system and toward a more certain future.

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### 34. Incentivize Bronx businesses to hire local high school students as interns

David Noah, Founding Principal, Comp Sci High

Throughout the Bronx, but especially in Hunts Point, Soundview, and Parkchester, there is a lack of work-based learning opportunities for Bronx youth. Of the opportunities that are available, many are with Manhattan-based corporations and nonprofits, which not every student may be interested in or qualified for. To combat this, the city and local Bronx elected officials should create a youth development program that incentivizes local Bronx businesses and start-ups to take on students as part-time, year-round interns. New York City's Department of Youth & Community Development would manage the program and oversee the collaboration between local Bronx businesses and schools. Studies repeatedly show that work-based learning experiences are critical to education and youth development. This initiative would be mutually beneficial in that local Bronx businesses would have a free or heavily subsidized worker and Bronx students would earn a wage and/or school credit, as well as gain critical skills and insight into how small businesses function all while going to school. Furthermore, it would address the high rates of school absenteeism in the Bronx, by adding a school attendance requirement for eligibility. With roughly half of Bronx students classified as chronically absent post-pandemic, we need more opportunities that simultaneously show kids the long-term economic value of school, while also creating immediate economic incentives to attend each day.

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### **35. Increase the minimum wage to pull people out of the cycle of poverty**

Eileen Torres, Executive Director, BronxWorks

The Bronx has historically been home to some of the poorest communities in New York City and in the United States. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 57 percent of Bronx residents were living below or near the poverty line, by far the highest rate of any borough. Much of the poverty is because a disproportionate share of Bronx residents work in low-wage jobs. Low income and poor economic opportunities prevent Bronx households from building savings and breaking from the cycle of generational poverty. These persistent economic challenges in the Bronx were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic that caused larger economic upheaval in the Bronx than the other boroughs. The unemployment rate in the Bronx peaked at nearly 25 percent, and similarly the borough has seen more eviction filings than any other county in New York. To allow Bronxites to thrive, Mayor Adams and the City Council should push Governor Hochul and Legislative leaders to increase the minimum wage in New York City. While the city's minimum wage is higher than the federal minimum, it is not enough to manage the high cost of living and recent trends in inflation. Both hourly and salaried workers' wages should increase. Once people have more opportunities to build wealth, they can look towards reinvesting in their communities. A higher minimum wage should not come at the expense of cutting public assistance programs offered in the Bronx but rather be a foundation that will make the positive effects of these programs more sustainable.

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### **36. Require digital literacy training for all city employees**

Natasha Green, CEO & Founder, Hidden Gems Archery and We Intervene

In 2021, nearly a quarter of households in the Bronx said they lacked internet access, and the same number noted that they had an inadequate number of digital devices in their homes.<sup>17</sup> During Covid lockdowns, this made attending school, meetings, and doctor's appointments nearly impossible. Thankfully, in 2021, the New York State Legislature passed a \$15 million statewide Digital Inclusion Grant Program. This vital grant covered affordable broadband access, devices and training with technical support, and digital resources. The program is a great start, but a lot more progress is needed. One relatively untapped opportunity is to ensure that the many city employees who live in the Bronx all become digitally literate—and then harness them to help make the entire borough better connected and more technologically savvy. The Department of Citywide Administrative Services and NYC Tech Office should work together to expand the Citywide Training Center to include more focused digital learning pathways that cater to city employees' particular roles. Digital literacy courses should be more involved than watching online presentations and answering questions afterward. They must include digital tasks that are aligned with the employee's particular role. Digitally literate city employees living and working in the Bronx can lead by example, spread the knowledge, and pave the way for a more digitally savvy borough.

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### **37. Introduce a mandatory financial literacy course in every public high school**

**Carlos Moreno, Co-Executive Director, Big Picture Learning**

In the Bronx, where the poverty rate is a devastating 24.4 percent, it is critically important to ensure that young people possess fundamental financial literacy skills. Without core courses—or financial mentorship—this lack of basic financial literacy leads to irresponsible spending and inadequate basic banking know-how. Helping young people live lives of their own financial design establishes healthy financial behaviors and patterns, builds generational wealth, and facilitates economic mobility. Yet, New York City requires no financial literacy course to graduate from its high schools. NYC Public Schools can take an impactful step forward to address this issue by instituting an institutionalized personal finance course for high school students across the city. This course should address commonly asked questions among Bronx youth, including how to open a checking account, how to earn a good credit score, and the best way to save for college. Additionally, NYC Public Schools should partner with the local chambers of commerce to develop a unit that would specifically provide support to students who want to start a business upon graduation. This unit will ensure that all students can achieve success, not just those for whom college is the chosen next step. Teaching our youth how to invest in themselves, literally, might be the best service that the city can provide to make for a thriving, more equitable Bronx.

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### **38. Develop a year-long internship or work-study program for CUNY students in the Bronx**

**Daisy Cocco De Filippis, President, Hostos Community College**

The Bronx's three City University of New York (CUNY) campuses—Hostos Community College, Bronx Community College, and Lehman College—today enroll more than 20,000 students. These young Bronx residents benefit immensely from the city's most affordable pathway to a college credential. However, only a tiny fraction of them takes advantage of a resource that has proven invaluable in setting up students for career success: a paid internship. Only 6 percent of students at Hostos, 5 percent at BCC, and 7 percent at Lehman report having a paid internship. These rates will need to increase significantly if the Bronx is going to succeed in elevating more of its residents into the middle class. At Hostos, most students who've had an internship have gotten a job immediately. The challenge is that most CUNY students in the Bronx come from very low-income households and need to earn income while taking classes to afford basic costs like housing, food, and childcare. Many students forego paid internships in a promising field simply because it doesn't offer the same income stability as a job, even one in a low-wage field. That's because internships are typically tied to the school calendar, leaving students with no income for more than a month between semesters. To change this, city and borough leaders should work with CUNY to fund a new year-long internship or work-study program—perhaps partnering with local community organizations who would benefit from employing college students who are vested in the borough.

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### **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

One in four Bronx residents lives below the poverty line, and, for many residents looking to end the cycle of hardship, technical skills training is a concrete path toward economic improvement.<sup>18</sup> However, workforce training that can prepare individuals for a more lucrative career comes with its own barriers to access—it's difficult to make time to participate in a training program when you have more immediate needs to address, like paying rent and putting food on the table. To help, the City Council should fund stipends for individuals who are enrolled in evidence-based full-time skills training programs to offset living expenses. In 2021, Per Scholas partnered with SkillUp to test the impact of stipends for lower-income learners. The study found an 18 percent increase in graduation rates and a 10 percent increase in employment outcomes; in fact, individuals who received a stipend were hired in tech roles significantly faster than those who did not. Stipends were used to pay for essentials: food, utilities, safe childcare, and transportation. Graduates of these programs positively contribute to the economy, generating up to five times the investment originally placed in funding the stipends program. Simply put, stipends work and lead to better outcomes. Imagine if stipends were widely available to all of those enrolled in proven models of training, such as Per Scholas. A large-scale commitment to stipends is what Bronx workers will need to complete their training and increase economic impact in the city.

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### **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

The Bronx's reputation as violent is keeping the borough from reaching its full economic potential. Unlike Fordham Road, which is one of the city's most heavily foot trafficked thoroughfares with nearly 80,000 daily pedestrians, so many of the Bronx's local businesses do not get the foot traffic they need from tourists and local residents alike due to the borough's infamously high crime rate. According to a recent survey conducted by the Fordham Road BID that canvassed business owners, customers, street vendors, and other residents, the largest concern that all groups shared when it came to improving the Bronx was security. One easy way to help the Bronx become more secure is to incentivize businesses to hire local workers. With community members working the cash register, others in the neighborhood will be more likely to respect the businesses. This shift in hiring practice would not just uphold security but would also work to strengthen local businesses' ties to the community. To implement this, the New York City Department of Small Business Services should establish a special fund available to small businesses expressly to be used for hiring and compensating workers who hail from the surrounding neighborhoods. If businesses had more resources to hire more local workers, they would become essential to their neighborhoods, and violence would quickly decline, as crime has no place within a tight-knit community.

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## 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

In many residential neighborhoods across the Bronx, trash cans are few and far between. Bins are quickly filled to overflowing, and many people end up simply littering. On a windy day, trash whisks through the air, landing in the streets. Parks also suffer from this problem, with too few trash cans and infrequent collections, meaning that dog droppings saturate community green spaces. The solution lies in a collaborative effort between the city government, local businesses, and Bronx community members. The first step in creating a “culture of cleanliness” is for the Department of Sanitation to bolster the litter basket supply throughout neighborhood streets and parks. Even small ticket disposal containers on buses can help, not to mention increased trash collection across the borough. The city could also work with local Business Improvement Districts and volunteer groups to create a public awareness campaign for Bronx clean-up events. The city can set up the campaign, with Bronx community groups spearheading event organization and promotion. To incentivize resident participation, city agencies and businesses can also partner with these events, offering coupons or vouchers, and free advertising for local businesses. City-supported action that comes from within The Bronx itself will not only keep the streets clean but also help boost borough pride.

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## 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

The Bronx experiences more gun violence than any other borough, a problem that leaves residents unsafe, discourages economic investment, and sets too many young people on a path to incarceration and unemployment. To reduce violent crime, it is critical to identify the young people most at risk for dropping out of school or getting involved in gang activity, and instead of punishing them, direct their energy toward constructive and creative pursuits. The hip hop movement started when kids with a lot of talent felt hopeless and ignored, and demanded an outlet through music. Connecting young people to New York’s film industry is another, largely untapped opportunity to capture that talent. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) should support a new “Shoot Cameras, Not Guns” afterschool program, piloted in South Bronx schools, as a part of a comprehensive city strategy to reduce gun violence. This program would harness the expertise and mentorship of the city’s many filmmakers and photographers to help young people tell stories through film. It would host a competition, and then take those films and students to festivals around the country. To identify and recruit potential participants, the program would collaborate with school attendance officers, local police leaders, and the Administration for Children’s Services. The program, led by DYCD and non-profit organizations in partnership with the Hip Hop Museum, will prevent violence by engaging young people productively and add the perspective of people growing up on the streets to contemporary filmmaking.

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### **43. Support paid internships for high school and college students in nonprofit organizations**

Klaudio Rodriguez, Executive Director, The Bronx Museum of the Arts

Many teens in the Bronx don't have access to the same professional networks and connections that more affluent young people may have through their families and friends, seriously limiting their opportunities to obtain internships and entry-level positions in high-paying industries. Without these advantages, young adults in the Bronx need a first open door to begin their careers. The borough's nonprofit organizations can be instrumental in providing that first opportunity and experience for teens. Many nonprofits today are facing high staff turnover and employee shortages and are open to considering new ways to replenish their talent pipelines. City leaders should help them hire teens by providing funding for student stipends and staff mentorship time. This type of funding might enable the Bronx Museum of the Arts to further connect and mentor students. Providing them an avenue and opening doors to opportunities. Internship experiences help students make decisions about plans for post-graduation and draw young people into the creative sector, which needs—but too often lacks—the diverse perspectives of Bronx students. City leaders should help create a fund that nonprofit organizations can competitively apply for to offer paid, year-long internships to high school and college students. This would open opportunities to employment for young people while strengthening the borough's nonprofit organizations.

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### **44. Simplify the process for health professionals to refer patients to food pantries**

Judy Secon, Deputy Executive Director, New York Common Pantry

Shockingly, at least a quarter of Bronx residents struggle with food insecurity.<sup>19</sup> The result is that when many Bronx residents find themselves in public emergency rooms or walk-in clinics to address urgent health concerns, the underlying cause is food insecurity. For physicians and nurses, the next step should be simple: connect people in need with food pantries so that they can look after their health. Unfortunately, our current bureaucracy makes this unnecessarily difficult. The multiple systems in place to connect people with assistance are often convoluted and are anything but streamlined. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene should therefore work to develop a simple referral system for health professionals to connect patients with food pantries. When individuals come in both for well or emergency visits, and it becomes clear that one of the next courses of action is to combat food insecurity, healthcare professionals should have the ability to connect patients with a pantry in their area. An important component of this system would be a way for healthcare professionals to follow up to ensure their patients receive services. A more comprehensive referral system would enable more people to be referred to relevant services and receive the support they need. A well-fed Bronx is the key to a healthier, more equitable borough.



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## 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

The urban design and development of the Bronx stood as a pioneering achievement for its time, integrating towering structures with expansive European-inspired greenways to seamlessly connect the borough from east to west. Unfortunately, this legacy was marred by the misguided actions of Robert Moses, who dismantled meticulously planned neighborhoods to make way for highways, inadvertently dividing the borough into separate sections. To address the adverse effects of this historical legacy, city leaders should help realize a revitalized future for the Bronx that respects its original vision. They should strategically allocate a team of architects, urban planners, and developers to the Bronx office of the Department of City Planning. These experts could steer judicious planning decisions for upcoming rezoning and development projects and spearhead an ambitious revitalization effort aimed at restoring and enhancing the borough's built legacy, surpassing the scope of private developers' proposals. As a transformative first step, the team could seek economically viable proposals to transform the Cross Bronx Expressway and Bruckner Blvd into green spaces and human-centered planned developments, fostering community reconnection across the entire borough. Alternatively, the team might facilitate a design competition for targeted developments, prioritizing green spaces, affordable housing, and vibrant small businesses. Drawing inspiration from the "Big Dig" project by the Boston Planning & Development Agency, this team could envision their mission as one that reshapes the future urban landscape of the Bronx, promoting sustainable growth, community engagement, and a renewed sense of pride.

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## 46. Require the city to fund a living wage for all workers on city-funded contracts

Eric Rosenbaum, President & CEO, Project Renewal

Thousands of Bronx workers earn the \$15 per hour minimum wage when the living wage for a single working adult in the Bronx—the actual amount an individual in a household must earn to support his or herself and their family—is \$25.65 an hour.<sup>20</sup> The result is that most Bronxites live paycheck to paycheck and roughly a quarter of the borough's residents (24.4 percent) live below the poverty line.<sup>21</sup> To reduce this troubling poverty rate and increase financial security for Bronx residents, the City Council should pass legislation mandating that whenever the city issues a contract for services, any wages listed in the line items should be a living wage. This would significantly benefit frontline and human service workers contracted by the city, many of whom live in the Bronx in public housing or rent-regulated apartments. Rather than depend on an unlivable minimum wage and limited city benefits, mandating a living wage would both create a wage-lifting effect overall and the city would be able to secure money in the form of economic growth and taxes, which could then be injected back into some of the poorest sections of the city, including parts of the Bronx. When we lift wages through this mechanism, we are creating the capability to build more stable and equitable communities in the Bronx and New York City as a whole.



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## **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

The Bronx is the birthplace of many movements that have made a tremendous impact on the culture at large: from hip hop to salsa music to forms of street art. Yet there are few institutions honoring the Bronx's unique role in the nation's cultural history, and most children today aren't aware of the borough's important legacy. This is finally changing with the upcoming opening of the Hip Hop Museum. But city leaders should build on this momentum and make plans for other landmark cultural institutions in the borough. They can start by simplifying the process and providing seed funding for new cultural projects. Right now, the process for applying for government-based grants is overly complex, and there aren't enough resources to help would-be historians bring their ideas to fruition. With clearer guidelines and a simplified grant process, more, small cultural institutions would exist; and priority could be given to institutions that plan on addressing needs in specific communities. Creating additional institutions that celebrate the Bronx's unique place in history would increase pride among the borough's residents, kindle interest in creative careers, and attract tourists and visitors from other parts of New York City, boosting spending at local businesses.

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## **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

Close to a third of the shootings that have taken place in New York City this year occurred in the Bronx, making gun violence a troubling fact of life for many of the borough's young people.<sup>22</sup> Sadly, schools offer little refuge, leaving many Bronx students with a difficult hurdle to succeeding academically that young people in more affluent schools rarely have to contend with. In addition to the obvious need for more exhaustive background checks and mental health tests for future gun-owners, Mayor Adams and Schools Chancellor Banks should work to combat violence in and outside of school by doubling down on school protection and creating a program designed to encourage students to spend their free time in school buildings. Firstly, NYC Public Schools should develop a tighter partnership with the NYPD to enforce safety, making sure there is at least one police officer stationed at every public school, metal detectors at every entrance, and training programs teaching staff and students how to act in an emergency. Next, city leaders must update school buildings so they are reinforced with locks and unbreakable glass and start a prevention program where all secondary-level students enroll in a mental health class. After schools have been made safer, they should then become a place where students can find refuge, even on the weekends. To facilitate this, Bronx Borough President Gibson should fund a borough-wide entertainment program. As part of this program, schools would be able to host weekend events like craft fairs and concerts. A roundup of free weekend opportunities in the Bronx for families should be published weekly and made available in English and Spanish so that the Bronx's many young people can enjoy safe, fun weekdays and weekends.

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## 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

The Bronx is filled with young people hungry for opportunities that will set them on the path to well-paying jobs, and yet the borough persistently has the highest unemployment rate for young adults in the city. To address this, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) launched the Lattice Program, which hires more than 1,800 young people a year (80 percent are young people of color) to both perform jobs and learn about careers in STEM and other fields. In its second year, 200 young people continued with the Lattice Program and were promoted to elevated positions, and some have now been hired to WCS's staff. The program's work-based learning approach successfully opens new career pathways for borough residents who lack the experience and educational credentials to start a job, and helps them see potential job paths for the future. Furthermore, this model has demonstrated large numbers of young people in the Bronx are eager for opportunities and capable of advancing in professional environments. It is a model that should be replicated throughout the borough. Bronx Borough President Gibson or the borough's city council members should convene leaders from the institutions and businesses across the borough to create a borough-wide apprenticeship program to reach more young people ages 18 to 24. Many young people in the Bronx do not have family members who have worked in fields that provide higher wages, and this one-year program would provide them with that vital social capital.

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## 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

There are too many patches of land across the Bronx—often on the sides of highways or roads—that are eyesores; places where people have dumped piles of trash and left abandoned tires, trucks, and even boats. When public spaces are trash-laden, they invite dangerous activity, discourage investment, and contribute to Bronx residents feeling like they have been forgotten. Although the problem is highly visible, many of these eyesores never get cleaned up. One reason is that it is not always clear which city agency is responsible for maintaining open space. People in the Bronx make complaints through 311, there is confusion over who should respond, and too often, the result is inaction. The city's newly created Chief Public Realm Office, working with Bronx elected officials, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, the Office of Emergency Management, and/or a consultant, should convene a cross-agency forum to inform the creation of a comprehensive map of the borough to clearly delineate who is responsible for maintaining each open space. Examples where clarity is needed include: Exit 13 on I-87 going in both directions, the Jerome Avenue/Bainbridge Avenue stop on the 4 train, and the intersection of Van Cortlandt Park South and Bailey Avenue. These are very visible areas that impact a community's landscape—and ultimately, its self-esteem. This type of neglect is rarely seen in Manhattan, but it's all too common throughout the Bronx.

## Endnotes

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