



AIANY CIVIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM 2025







PROGRAM MISSION

The AIANY Civic Leadership Program (CLP) develops a class of emerging architectural professionals into civic leaders by refining the critical skills that design professionals need to better represent the people that they serve.

We do this by increasing architects' connections to their communities, developing their advocacy capacities, and supporting their pursuit of public service in elected or appointed office.

Each year, the CLP selects emerging design professionals to participate in a journey to improve their community outreach and public relations skills, strengthening the AIANY's culture of advocacy by providing opportunities to interface with municipal agencies, community development organizations, and local stakeholders.

AIANY President's Letter

Congratulations to the Ninth Cohort of the AIA New York + nycobaNOMA Civic Leadership Program!

In January 2025, I had the honor of being inducted as President of AIA New York and announced my presidential theme, "*See You IRL: Designing for Public Life.*" This theme centers on the importance of our shared physical spaces in New York City. At a time when digital connections often overshadow face-to-face interactions, this year's theme emphasizes the power of public spaces—our streets, parks, plazas, and more—as vital arenas for social connection, creativity, and civic engagement. Through thoughtful and collaborative design, architects and urban planners can foster inclusive, vibrant spaces that address present-day challenges including affordability, climate resilience, and equity. This year-long initiative will spotlight the role of architects in creating environments that promote joy, collaboration, and a sense of belonging, strengthening the urban fabric of our life.

The 2025 Civic Leadership Program cohort complemented their expertise with insights from a diverse array of guest contributors. These guests included the voices and wisdom of citizens who are deeply familiar with the design challenges and opportunities within their communities. The uniquely collaborative and inclusive approach this year's cohort chose underscores the importance of building meaningful relationships, exchanging knowledge, and gathering input from not only practitioners, but those that are most directly impacted by their choices. By weaving the community's needs, perspectives, and aspirations into the design process, we can create solutions that strengthen our shared public life.

I extend my gratitude to Suzanne Mecs, Evelyn Serrano, Jamie Teich, advisors Corey Arena, Sarah Yehuda, Tiana Howell, and Betsy Daniel, and the AIANY staff for their unwavering support of this program in its ninth year. Your dedication has been instrumental in nurturing a new generation of civic-minded leaders.

To the cohort: I hope this program has provided you with a strong foundation of skills, a network of perspectives, and the confidence to find your voice as leaders in civic engagement. I look forward to witnessing the long-term benefits of your willingness to address difficult issues and widen the conversation.

Congratulations again and may your journey in the wide field of architecture and design be one of purpose, inclusivity, and profound change.



Benjamin Gilmartin, AIA
2025 AIANY President

the 1990s, the number of people with a university degree has increased in all countries, but the increase has been most dramatic in the United States and the United Kingdom.

There are several reasons for the increase in the number of people with a university degree. One reason is that the number of people who are eligible for university education has increased. In the United States, for example, the number of people who are eligible for university education has increased from 19 million in 1980 to 25 million in 2000.

Another reason is that the number of people who are interested in university education has increased. In the United States, for example, the number of people who are interested in university education has increased from 15 million in 1980 to 20 million in 2000.

A third reason is that the number of people who are able to afford university education has increased. In the United States, for example, the number of people who are able to afford university education has increased from 10 million in 1980 to 15 million in 2000.

There are several reasons for the increase in the number of people who are able to afford university education. One reason is that the number of people who are able to pay for university education has increased.

Another reason is that the number of people who are able to work in the service sector has increased. In the United States, for example, the number of people who are able to work in the service sector has increased from 10 million in 1980 to 15 million in 2000.

A third reason is that the number of people who are able to work in the manufacturing sector has increased. In the United States, for example, the number of people who are able to work in the manufacturing sector has increased from 10 million in 1980 to 15 million in 2000.

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2025 LEADERS & ADVISOR TEAM



AIA NEW YORK LEADERSHIP TEAM



JESSE LAZAR

Assoc. AIA
Executive Director



SUZANNE MECS

Hon. AIA NYS
Managing Director



BRIA DONOHUE

Director, Government Affairs



EVELYN SERRANO

Membership Engagement
Coordinator



COREY ARENA

CLP Program Coordinator



JAMIE TEICH

Membership Engagement
and Data Administrator

2025 ADVISORS



BETSY DANIEL
AIA, LEED GA



TIANA HOWELL
Assoc. AIA, NOMA



SARAH YEHUDA



DORA BLUNT

NYC DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN AND
CONSTRUCTION

Dora Blount is a Senior Design Liaison at the NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC). Her professional interests center around art, architecture, and design in the public realm. She currently handles a complex portfolio valued at \$15B, including some of the City of New York's first design-build projects. She is responsible for ensuring that capital projects meet or exceed DDC's Design and Construction Excellence standards throughout the life of the project, from initial project planning and design consultant selection through design development to construction completion. She manages all Public Design Commission reviews for the projects in her portfolio, and coordinates with multiple other City agencies on design, including managing the implementation of the NYC Percent for Art Program with the Department of Cultural Affairs. She has worked on dozens of capital projects with renowned artists and architects to design and build a wide variety of interventions in public space, including furnishings, public art, landscapes, and high-rise buildings. Some of her projects include Hank Willis Thomas's Unity sculpture in Downtown Brooklyn, a mural by Tatiana Arocha at Snug Harbor Cultural Center, and a sculpture by Misha Kahn at Douglaston Library, among many others. She enjoys public service and working closely with artists and designers to make places better for the people who use them. She seeks the magical, sublime satisfaction that comes from good design. She holds a M.S. in City and Regional Planning from Pratt Institute and a B.A. in Historic Preservation and Community Planning from College of Charleston.

2025 LEADERS



KEVIN W. DAVIS

AIA, LEED AP

KWD Architecture

Kevin W. Davis, AIA, LEED AP is a registered architect with extensive global experience in design and construction, dedicated to creating sustainable, high-performance spaces for resilient communities. Having led large-scale retail and cultural projects worldwide, he excels at aligning conceptual innovation with commercial and sustainability goals. His expertise spans corporate leadership, community engagement, and cultivating diverse, inclusive teams. In 2024, Kevin founded KWD Architecture PLLC to help property owners and developers navigate the path to energy efficiency. He is actively engaged in industry advocacy, serving on Urban Green Council's Program Committee and Build Out Alliance's Advocacy Committee, championing LGBTQ+ representation in the building industry. Most recently, Davis was appointed a Public Member on Queens Community Board 2's Environment and Parks Committee. His credentials include an architecture license (NY), LEED ID+C AP, and training in sustainable construction and climate leadership. Previously, Davis spent nearly 20 years at Calvin Klein, Inc., where he led global retail design, overseeing over 1,000 projects and collaborating with industry icons like Raf Simons, John Pawson, and Sterling Ruby. He spearheaded CKI's Global Store Design Sustainability Guidelines, integrating sustainable practices across site criteria, materials, and MEP systems. Earlier in his career, Davis contributed to prestigious projects at Gabellini Sheppard Architects, Studio Passarelli, and Salsano Fahim Architects, working on landmark developments from Milan to New York and Rome. He holds a B.A. from Yale University and a Master of Architecture from Columbia



BRADLEY DEBOSE

NOMA

URBAHN ARCHITECTS

Bradley DeBose is an award-winning architectural professional with over 15 years of experience in the AEC industry. Holding architecture degrees from Auburn University and Georgia Institute of Technology, Brad combines design expertise with strategic vision to lead significant initiatives across the Tri-State area.

At Urbahn Architects, Brad has secured multi-million-dollar project wins while enhancing the firm's market position through strategic positioning and client engagement. His professional experience with DIGroup Architecture, Façade Solutions New York, Jorge Mastropietro Architects, and Gensler has refined his ability to align innovative design solutions with market opportunities.

A dedicated advocate for equity in the built environment, Brad champions justice-centered design and expands career pathways for formerly incarcerated individuals within architecture and construction. His civic engagement includes serving on the Board of Trustees for Family Promise of Hudson County, partnering with government officials to advocate for housing reform, alongside leadership roles with the NOMA National Elevate Committee, nycobaNOMA, and the AIA New York ENYA Committee. Brad actively supports NOMAS & AIAS student chapters and mentors emerging professionals through the Center for Architecture.

Brad's practice embodies the principle that inclusive leadership and intentional design create meaningful change—strengthening communities and fostering opportunity for all.



SAMANTHA MARIE DIXON
ASSOC. AIA, NOMA
HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE

Originally from Jamaica, Samantha Marie Dixon moved to New York to pursue her Bachelor of Architecture at the New York Institute of Technology, graduating in 2023. Her passion for architecture is rooted in a deep belief that the built environment can be a powerful catalyst for social change. This philosophy led her to focus her senior thesis on a supportive housing proposal for individuals experiencing homelessness due to systemic and personal challenges. The project emphasized holistic design solutions that foster long-term stability and personal growth. While in college, Dixon worked closely with a sisterhood-driven service organization that has allowed her to engage in civic initiatives on a broader scale. Through its mission-driven focus on economic development, educational, international awareness and involvement, physical and mental health, and political awareness and involvement, she had the opportunity to contribute to a range of efforts aimed at promoting equity and access. She currently works with the Harlem Children's Zone, a nonprofit organization committed to ending intergenerational poverty in Central Harlem. In her role as an educator, she designed and implemented a curriculum that introduces high school students to architecture with the hope of making the field more accessible, engaging, and empowering for young people. Dixon intends to pursue licensure and has plans to further her education through a Public Policy program, with the goal of influencing housing policy and contributing to comprehensive, lasting solutions for housing insecurity.



EWAN FRENCH

Buro Happold

Ewan French is a sustainability advisor at Buro Happold, a global built environment consultancy. He supports public and private organizations in understanding their environmental and social impacts and develops strategies and governance structures for effective implementation. His work spans diverse geographies, from the Battery Park City Authority to the Middle East, where he spent his childhood. French's interests extend beyond traditional sustainability metrics like carbon and energy. He is particularly passionate about integrating often-overlooked social considerations into business strategy, from the needs of local communities affected by development to the conditions of workers in global supply chains. Having begun his career in Buro Happold's UK offices, he brings international insight to his work, including tools such as "social value" measurement. French is an active member of industry groups, including Urban Green Council and Design for Freedom, a thought leadership initiative focused on eliminating forced labor in construction supply chains. He also serves as an ambassador for the Happold Foundation, supporting organizations focused on community-led design and workforce development. Recent collaborators include the Van Alen Institute, Street Lab, and Stacks & Joules.

2025 LEADERS



MAHA IDREES

AECOM

Maha Idrees is a trained professional with seven years' experience as an architect and design manager specializing in designing, permitting and overseeing construction projects. As a Deputy Design Manager at AECOM, Idrees is currently leading owner's representation efforts on the Borough Based Jails Program at the Brooklyn Facility, which is a \$3 Billion Design-Build civic project breaking ideological boundaries about the larger question of equitable detainment and human dignity. With her experience as an architect and having completed graduate studies in Construction Administration at Columbia University, Idrees brings expertise in navigating complex civic projects through the lens of design excellence and construction leadership. Beyond her professional work, she has served as a guest lecturer at Columbia University, mentoring the next generation of architects and construction leaders to think holistically about the evolution of New York's built environment. Her personal core interests lie in the inquiry, assemblage and expression of knowledge and thought scape, from whence she investigates the larger questions of the world and formulates ideas to innovate and learn from the legacies left by thought pioneers. As a Pakistani immigrant and a single mother, Idrees understands the transformative power of strategic design and resilient leadership. Her journey—from breaking personal and professional barriers—has fueled her passion for fostering equity in urban development and expanding opportunities for women and underrepresented communities in design and construction; envisioning a future where construction and design are not only about buildings but about empowering people and strengthening communities.



RASHIDA MOMOH

NYC DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING
PRESERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

Throughout her career, Rashida has always strived to use design thinking as a vehicle for improving communities. She is currently working as a freelance architectural designer, and with this program, she hopes to channel her knowledge of architecture and strategic planning to develop advocacy efforts that serve the public.

She received her BArch from Mississippi State University and then moved to Boston, MA, to work for designLAB Architects on the interior renovation of UMass Amherst's Fine Arts Center Bridge. After receiving her MArch in Housing and Urbanism at the Architectural Association School of Architecture, Rashida worked as a Strategic Planning Coordinator for the NYC Department of Design and Construction. Rashida aided in developing process improvement strategies such as Advanced Capital Planning and the PDC/DDC Joint Recommendations. Rashida then worked as an Assistant Project Manager for Zubatkin Owner's Representative on projects including The New Goodhue Center and The Browning School. Additionally, Rashida's time working at 5th Studio in Cambridge, England on residential masterplanning projects provides an international perspective that she brings to each new venture.

Her experiences volunteering with BOSNOMA's Project Pipeline and the Neighborhood Design Project address the lack of information shared with children and teens about design professions. In each program, the participants were asked to develop design solutions that aided their communities. This thought process will hopefully inspire the next generation of decision-makers to take pride in their communities and know they can spark change.

2025 LEADERS



AYANA SMITH

CENTER FOR JUSTICE INNOVATION

Ayana Smith is an experienced grassroots organizer increasing the civic consciousness, capacities, and participation of fellow New Yorkers in the movement toward self-determining communities. She serves as a Program Manager at the Center for Justice Innovation, where she is an implementation provider for the Mayor’s Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, an initiative that aims to improve public safety in 30 NYCHA developments across NYC through creative placekeeping projects rooted in resident-led participatory design practices. A recent graduate of Cornell University, where she earned her Bachelor of Science with Honors in Urban and Regional Studies with a minor in Education, Smith is an alumna of 2023–24 Forefront Fellowship at the Urban Design Forum where she co-authored “Free to Grow: The Case for Quality Outdoor Spaces for All Youth” and co-led the “Youth-led Libraries of the Future” project. In addition to her current position, Smith is a Forum Fellow at the Urban Design Forum and is enrolled in the Managing for Innovation Program Managers’ Forum through the NYC Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity and CUNY School of Professional Studies Office of Innovative Learning Solutions.



PROGRAM KICKOFF

Speakers:

COREY ARENA

CLP Program Coordinator, Senior Architectural Designer, Gans and Company

SUZANNE MECS

Managing Director, AIANY

EVELYN SERRANO

Membership Engagement Manager, AIANY

BENJAMIN GILMARTIN

President, AIANY Board of Directors

Partner, Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R)

STEPHEN M. WILDER

Chapter President, nycoba |NOMA

Founder/Principal, Think Wilder Architecture

FAITH ROSE

Partner, O'Neill Rose Architects





DEVELOPMENT SESSION #1

THRIVING TOGETHER: ADDRESSING NEW YORK'S ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Julia Fruithandler and Silvia Vercher Pons

Guest Speakers:

Jasmin Tepale

Senior Lead for Community Planning at the NYC Department of City Planning

Taya Mueller

District Manager at Brooklyn Community Board 2

Rajesh Sankat

Program Strategist at 3x3

Benjamin Solotaire

Senior Advisor at the NYC Civic Engagement Commission

Caron Atlas

Director of Arts and Democracy

Alex Munoz

Assistant Director of Community Engagement for the GreenThumb Program at the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation

Norberto Acevedo

Director of the Office of Community Outreach & Notification at NYC Department of Design and Construction

Margaret Brewer

Chair at Brooklyn Community Board 16

Celeste León

District Manager at Brooklyn Community Board 4

INTRODUCTION

On July 11, 2025, the AIANY Civic Leadership Program (CLP) hosted “Reimagining Public Engagement with New York City Community Boards.” By the time a public project comes before a community board, the project is already scoped, funded, procured, located, and schematically designed. Opportunities for input from the community are limited at this point, but can provide useful small-scale public realm design insights. Using Arnstein’s Ladder for Citizen Participation as the grounding framework for our development session, attendees represented community boards and district offices, public agencies, and non-profit organizations in a discourse that confronted the following: What would a truly community-based system of public and private project development look like?

COMMUNITY BOARDS OF THE PRESENT

Jasmin Tepale, Senior Lead for Community Planning at the NYC Department of City Planning, opened the event space with an icebreaker activity: Our Community Board Story. Participants responded engaged in a drawing, writing, and conversation about prompts designed to measure understanding of what a community board is, level of engagement with community boards, and overall experience with community boards. From this activity, attendees wrote the following narrative—a culmination of collective experiences—about community boards:

After gauging people's understanding, level of engagement, and overall experience with community boards, attendees listened to a presentation from Taya Mueller, District Manager of Brooklyn Community Board 2 in Downtown Brooklyn, Boerum Hill, Brooklyn Heights, DUMBO, Vinegar Hill, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, and the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where she provided context on the history of community boards and district offices and discussed current challenges faced, such as understaffing and underfunding and now the digital divide.

DEGREES OF CITIZEN POWER IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PRACTICE.

To respond to the tensions identified in history of community boards and current opportunities and challenges community boards experience, we explored several models of citizen participation. On an institutional level, Alex Munoz, the Assistant Director of Community Engagement for the GreenThumb Program at the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, models of citizen participation exist through NYC GreenThumb, where attendees learned how city government serves as service providers to community groups in the development and maintenance of garden spaces across NYC. On programmatic levels, speakers Benjamin Solotaire, the Senior Advisor at the NYC Civic Engagement Commission, and Caron Atlas, the Director of Arts and Democracy, presented engagement strategies that can be implemented at community meetings to enliven the meeting space.

COMMUNITY BOARDS OF THE NEW AGE.

Combining the findings from the second part of Jasmin's community visioning activity where attendees responding to prompts related to the community board dream and Rajesh Sankat's, Program Strategist at 3x3, activity on appreciative inquiry, attendees created a shared vision for community boards in the 21st Century:

CONCLUSION

In closing, attendees interrogated the history of community boards, explored models of citizen participation that exist within NYC government and engagement strategies from non-profit organizations, and dreamed of the future of community boards—reimagining them as sites of citizen participation and self-determination.. From roundtable discussion with lead discussants Margaret Brewer, Chair of Brooklyn Community Board 16 in Brownsville and Ocean Hill; Celeste Leon, District Manager of Brooklyn Community Board 4 in Bushwick; and Norberto Acevedo, Director Office of Community Outreach & Notification at the NYC Department of Design and Construction, we identified the following actions that can see this future into fruition:

(1) Build off existing advocacy from district management offices to hire additional staff to provide technical assistance to community boards; (2) train community board representatives to meaningfully participate in architectural, design, and planning conversations and processes; and (3) position community boards as direct consultants in design and planning processes.

IN “COMMUNITY BOARDS OF THE PRESENT.”

Our Community Board Story

In the 20th century, we served on the Youth, Human Services, and Education committee on Brooklyn Community Board 6. As we reflect on what we love about the work that we do as we wait for the meeting to begin—through hosting committee meetings, community events, and walking tours we build meaningful connections with multi-generational residents eager to tell stories of the neighborhood and newcomers. To us, the community board is the most accessible form of government to everyday people—serving as a site of shared learning, engagement with city agencies, and resource when we need help. As the presentation ensues—frustration from long-time residents that the proposal ignores longstanding issues presented in the annual Community Needs Statement, interruptions from community members with questions about this proposal, and anxieties from designers and planners who serve as liaisons between the people and the city or firm. In its current state, community boards are best described as sites of grief, where fulfillment and anxieties coalesce to disrupt public forums on architectural, design, and planning processes.

IN “COMMUNITY BOARDS OF THE NEW AGE.”

Our Vision for Community Boards of the New Age

In the 21st century, we envision that community boards are deeply interwoven into the ecologies of their neighborhoods—both the built and social fabric, the digital and non-digital environment. At the street’s edge, under the green signage indicating the intersection is a third wayfinding sign, “Brooklyn Community Board 6;” on the digital board as we round the corner, “Brooklyn Community Board 6 general body meetings the first Wednesday of every month at 6 pm” and a list of ongoing projects within the neighborhood (with expected completion dates). Entering the community board building for the meeting, localized offices for each of the public agencies lead to the central meeting room where we enter a hybrid space that allows students commuting from after school clubs, parents with small children, and evening workers to join the meeting virtually to participate in discourse pertaining to their communities.



WELCOMING ARTS AND CULTURE: REMOVING BARRIERS TO PUBLIC SPACE PROGRAMMING IN NYC

Rashida Momoh and Ewan French

Guest Speakers:

Akemi Sato

Director of Programs, Design Trust for Public Space

Rene Cuenca

Senior Program Manager of Capacity Building for
Neighborhood Development, NYS Small Business Services

Nur Asri

Public Space Management Fellow, Design
Trust for Public Space

Ryan Gilliam

Executive Director, FABnyc

Has over-regulation, government complexity, and top-down cultural programming jeopardized New York's identity as a thriving hub of arts and culture? This question was at the center of the second development session of the 2025 AIANY Civic Leadership Program, organized by Rashida Momoh and Ewan French.

The arts and culture sector is under pressure in the city. In a turbulent moment for non-profits and local governments, and amid an affordability crisis for artists, the public realm should remain one of the few accessible avenues for artistic expression. The session's speakers, however, discussed the city's intricate permitting process and how it creates a significant barrier to artists bringing their work to parks, streets, and sidewalks. They also offered ideas to incentivize public realm activation, foster catalytic partnerships, and improve regulatory frameworks to better support artists.

After an introductory presentation on the topic, the speakers presented the access disparity to public space and cultural assets that artists face. Akemi Sato from the Design Trust for Public Space spoke on Turnout NYC, a program that prototyped flexible and semi-permanent outdoor venues in collaboration with cultural partners within each borough. The program aimed to provide infrastructure to underutilized communities, fill capacity gaps for the cultural partners, and give arts organizations, artists, and community leaders greater agency in defining programming and curatorial practice. Justin Wong, a multi-disciplinary artist and Teaching Artist at Friends of the High Line, urged artists to be part of the organization of cultural programming rather than being treated as a vendor. He emphasized artists' unique ability to navigate

prescribed limitations while also pushing creative boundaries.

Rene Cuenca, Senior Program Manager of Capacity Building for Neighborhood Development at the NYC Small Business Services (SBS), provided an overview of the work that groups such as Partnerships for Parks and SBS do to support community development strategies, park partnerships, and to improve access to funding programs. Nur Asri from Design Trust for Public Space and Think Place Agency shared insight into the ongoing research initiative, Untaped, which deciphers the tangled web of NYC's permitting structure and provides alternative, efficient paths for community members to host events.

Ryan Gilliam, Executive Director of FABnyc, gave the concluding presentation on the organization's work to support artists in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She emphasized the need to focus on the communities at risk of displacement through gentrification, and to ensure that arts and cultural programming is adequately considering their cultures and identities.



Gilliam also echoed some of the opportunities to improve the permitting process, using the HALO installation's temporary art permitting as an example of the need to better enable communities to steward their art and culture programming.

This development session highlighted how systematic barriers, from convoluted permitting to inequitable distribution of opportunities, have consistently held artists back from showcasing their work. Through a more transparent system, strategic partnerships, and support for artists, the city can regain a sense of artistic spontaneity and further community stewardship.



SERVING THE WORKING HOMELESS: HOW REENTRY MODELS CAN GUIDE NYC HOUSING AGENCIES

Bradley Debose Assoc., AIA, NOMA, and Samantha Dixon, Assoc., AIA

Guest Speakers:

Christina Green

Vice President for Housing Operations, Osborne Association

Nadine Maleh

Principal of Housing Systems, Community Solutions

Richard Rivera

Asst. to Exec. Dir., Special Initiatives, Center for Community Alternatives

Patrick Stephens Youth Services Leadership Fellow, Center for Community Alternatives

The AIANY Civic Leadership Program recently held its third Development Session, organized by Bradley DeBose, Assoc. AIA, NOMA, and Samantha Dixon, Assoc. AIA. The session explored a critical question: Can nonprofit reentry models designed for justice-involved individuals inform how New York City supports the working homeless?

Specialized services tailored to individual needs can make the difference between merely surviving and truly thriving. When support systems, employment opportunities, and stable housing are aligned, they create a strong foundation for long-term success. For the working homeless, who already maintain employment while struggling with housing insecurity, the challenge lies in navigating the fragmented system of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Housing is often treated as a standalone service, leaving individuals to juggle work, family responsibilities, and other nuanced needs without coordinated support. The Public Policy Lab's Navigating Home project illustrates this complexity by condensing the DHS process into a clear, transparent guide, highlighting the obstacles individuals face while moving through the system. In contrast, nonprofit agencies serving the formerly incarcerated have, through ongoing trial and error, been developing approaches that address the unique needs of their populations, offering lessons on fostering stability, autonomy, and lasting outcomes. These models suggest that city agencies could similarly refine their programs, moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches to design services that truly meet the specific needs of the working homeless.

Insights from Nonprofit Models

Panelists emphasized how reentry-focused organizations have developed

integrated systems that could guide improvements for the working homeless. Christina Green, Vice President of Housing Operations and Projects at Osborne Association, highlighted the value of credible messengers: staff with lived experience who build trust and help residents succeed. Osborne's portfolio prioritizes stability and supportive services for justice-involved individuals.

Felipe Vargas, Senior Vice President of Programs at The Doe Fund, presented on the Ready, Willing and Able program. By combining transitional housing, paid work, and vocational training, participants gain essential skills while receiving immediate stability. Nadine Maleh, Principal of Housing Systems at Community Solutions Inc., described projects like Andrews House, where shared community spaces and customizable units foster resident autonomy while embedding supportive services.

Patrick Stephens, Youth Services Leadership Fellow at the Center for Community Alternatives, discussed planning ahead for reentry, emphasizing mitigation reports that anticipate the support



individuals will need upon release. Richard Rivera, Assistant to the Executive Director for Special Initiatives at the Center for Community Alternatives, shared lessons from Westchester County, where programs that reduce strict eligibility requirements and emphasize case management have improved housing outcomes.

Moving Toward Lasting Solutions

These examples offer a roadmap for New York City. By learning from nonprofit innovation, city agencies can move from one-size-fits-all systems to coordinated, specialized services. The infrastructure and expertise already exist—what is needed now is the will to adapt.

If city agencies merge the best practices of reentry programs with the specific needs of the working homeless, New York City can move beyond crisis management toward lasting stability. Integrating housing, employment, and support services into a cohesive framework can provide stability, reduce barriers to employment, and create pathways for long-term success for the working homeless. These lessons demonstrate that proactive, tailored approaches are not only possible but highly effective, offering a model for cities seeking to address housing insecurity in a meaningful way.



BUILDING TOWARD ZERO: HOUSING FOR A SUSTAINABLE NYC

Maha Idrees and Kevin Davis, AIA, LEED AP

Guest Speakers:

Will DiMaggio

Senior Advisor, MOCEJ

Jennifer Bloom Leone, AIA

Assistant Commissioner | Chief Sustainability Officer, NYC HPD

Brendan Pillar

Deputy Director of Climate and Sustainability Planning, NYC DCP

John Parkinson

Lecturer, Columbia University + Founding Executive Director, ULI

Walter Rodriguez Meyer, PLA

Principal, Local Office Landscape & Design

Kavya Cherala, AIA, LEED AP BD+C

Project Architect, Dattner Architects

How can New York City tackle its housing challenges without deepening its climate crisis?

That big question framed the fourth development session of the 2025 AIANY Civic Leadership Program, “Building Toward Zero: Housing for a Sustainable NYC – Development, Equity & Environmental Responsibility,” hosted on August 22 by Civic Leaders Maha Idrees and Kevin Davis, AIA, LEED AP.

The session brought together a dynamic mix of architects, city officials, academics, and community advocates to wrestle with one of the city’s most pressing dual challenges: providing affordable housing while meeting ambitious climate goals.

New York is facing record-low housing vacancies, rising rents, and a growing shelter population. At the same time, buildings account for nearly 70% of the city’s greenhouse gas emission, most of which are emitted by aging, inefficient housing stock. The result: a city where housing instability and environmental vulnerability often go together, especially for low-income communities.

Panelists from the NYC Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development, Department of City Planning, and the Urban Land Institute shared insights into the scale of the problem, and how agencies are pushing for solutions. The session also highlighted innovative approaches to sustainable, equitable neighborhood development that can only be seen as beacons of New York’s response to the crisis.

Walter Meyer, PLA, ASLA, of Local Office Design presented the Arverne East and Beach Green Dunes projects in Queens, which integrate climate resilience directly into community design. Kavya Cherala, AIA, from Dattner Architects shared Brooklyn's Alafia development, designed to deliver affordable housing alongside ambitious environmental performance goals. Both presentations showed how design can simultaneously address displacement, affordability, and net-zero living. Additionally, community-based innovations in solar projects were introduced by speakers Emily Sweeney from Sustainable CUNY and Gretchen Bradley representing Solar One, shifting the focus to energy equity. They highlighted community solar projects that allow New Yorkers, especially renters and low-income residents to access renewable energy, lower utility bills, and actively participate in the city's clean energy transition.

The Civic Leadership Program's final development session underscored that New York City cannot solve its housing crisis in isolation from its climate crisis and that true progress requires collaboration across agencies, design professionals, developers and communities to ensure that sustainability and equity advance together.





PUBLIC EVENT #1

BUILDING JUSTICE: THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF DESIGN

Dora Blount, Samantha Dixon, Ewan French, and Maha Idrees

Guest Speakers:

Aman Krishan, AIA, CoA, LEED GA

Design Principal, HOK

Allan Co, AIA, AICP

Designing Justice + Designing Spaces; Founder, Crescere Collaborative

Beverly Prior, FAIA, LEED AP, NCARB, DBIA

Vice President, Senior Program Manager, Borough Based Jails Program, AECOM-Hill Joint Venture

Jeff Goodale, AIA, NCARB

Senior Principal, Director of Civic + Justice, HOK

Patrick Stephens, MPS

Youth Services Leadership Fellow, Center for Community Alternatives

Dr. Paula Kliger, PhD

Clinical Psychologist, Thinc Design; Founder, Psychological Assets

This year's first AIANY Civic Leadership Program public session, Building Justice: The Limits and Possibilities of Design, invited practitioners from across the fields of architecture, psychology, and justice reform to examine the uneasy relationship between design and incarceration. The event explored the tension—outlined by the 2020 AIANY Criminal Justice Facilities statement—between improving justice buildings within the current system as a step toward reform, and rejecting that system altogether in favor of restorative, community-based alternatives.

A number of the speakers are involved in the design of the Borough Based Jails (BBJ) Program initiative, the next iteration of New York's justice system to replace Rikers Island. These practitioners discussed what it means to make these environments safer and more humane: designing spaces with daylight and visibility, creating reception areas that feel less punitive, and accounting for an aging incarcerated population. If jails are to remain for decades, they asked, shouldn't they at least affirm the humanity of the people who move through them—staff, visitors, and especially the incarcerated population?

Other speakers questioned the premise of incarceration altogether. They spoke of restorative justice, reentry housing, and community infrastructure as alternatives to the current system, which seems to prioritize not just separation of inmates from the general public, but punitive conditions designed for suffering. Architecture, they argued, has too often been a tool of control, shaping not only buildings but the social hierarchies embedded within them. True justice design, in this view, demands shifting the focus from containment to connection, from punishment to rehabilitation.

When discussing the complex planning required for the closure of Rikers Island (an initiative there seemed to be consensus for), one speaker called it a “wicked problem”—an entanglement of social, economic, and political forces that makes a “perfect” approach impossible for BBJ. Another described jails as “total institutions”—places that regulate every aspect of daily life, shaping not only behavior but identity.

In addition to the abolitionist challenge to BBJ, questions were raised about how well the institutions would be able to maintain the conditions presented in the glossy architectural renderings. One speaker noted that even within the current system, “good jails” aren’t about the form, but the substance such as the education systems and other services within them.

The evening left room for contradiction rather than closure. Reformists and abolitionists both presented their distinct efforts to confront systemic harm, each striving toward a more just alternative, differentiated largely by their timelines for change. The event concluded with a participatory workshop, encouraging attendees to share perspectives on how the architecture and design community can advance equity, dignity, and humanity within the justice system.





PUBLIC EVENT #2

FROM DISINVESTMENT TO RENEWAL: REIMAGINING NYC PUBLIC HOUSING

Bradley Debose, Kevin Davis, Rashida Momoh, and Ayana Smith

Guest Speakers:

Allison Lane, AIA, NOMA, ASID, NCARB, NCIDQ, LEED AP, WELL AP

Senior Associate and Housing Studio Lead, AECOM

Joy Sinderbrand, WEDG

Senior Vice President for Capital Programs, NYCHA

John Paraskevopoulos

Legislative Director for Assemblymember Emily Gallagher

Gina Boatright

Angel Rivera

RETI Center Intern

Chronic disinvestment has plagued New York City's public housing for decades, resulting in operational challenges and deteriorating buildings. Although private sector partnerships mitigate these obstacles, the efforts are dwarfed by increasing multi-billion-dollar capital needs. With this backdrop, the 2025 cohort of the Civic Leadership Program held its second public event to discuss recommendations for a more equitable affordable housing system. On Thursday November 6th, cohort members Ayana Smith, Bradley DeBose, NOMA, Kevin Davis, AIA, LEED AP, and Rashida Momoh, convened expert panelists to examine the history and current state of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), analyze emerging social housing models, and discuss how architects can learn from NYCHA and aspirations of social housing to shape sustainable reinvestment strategies.

As of 2023, NYCHA requires over \$70 billion dollars to bring its portfolio to a state of good repair. To supplement this deficit, panelist Joy Sinderbrand, the Senior Vice President for Capital Programs at NYCHA, outlined a robust set of capital management initiatives that are largely funded through public-private partnership—including component-focused renovations, sustainability initiatives, and comprehensive modernization. The latter strategy refurbishes 60%-to 90%percent of properties through design build—, shortening project timelines while providing a holistic solution. Panelist Allison Lane, a Senior Associate and Housing Studio Lead at AECOM, grounded this approach through project case studies and technical aspects of design excellence. Lane presented four comprehensive modernization projects – —across three boroughs and covering over 38 buildings and 3,600 apartments – —containing upgraded building systems, interiors, and envelopes to improve the daily life of over 8,000 residents.

Uplifting resident voices is critical to public housing advocacy, and in this spirit, the public event commenced with a 10-minute play highlighting the everyday hurdles of residents, property managers, and other stakeholders. The three acts, performed by the 4four cohort members and two2 guests, aggregated experiences from Ayana Smith, a former NYCHA resident, with feedback from guest participants Angel Rivera, a NYCHA resident, and Gina Boatright, a NYCHA Tenant Association President. Along with Smith, Rivera and Boatright gave final remarks citing a need for increased collaboration and transparency with residents in the design and implementation process.

Examining New York City's history offered alternative social housing frameworks that could lead to a transformative future. The Amalgamated Housing Cooperative of 1927 was the first instance of social housing in the city, and – –with more recent projects in the 1970s through the Mitchell Lama program and the Urban Development Corporation – –social housing is once again gaining traction. As championed by panelist John Paraskevopoulos, Legislative Director for New York State Assemblymember Emily Gallagher, the proposed Social Housing Development Authority (SHDA) would have greater flexibility and independence than city agencies to finance, acquire, and maintain affordable housing. Recent polling by Data For Progress reveals strong voter support for prioritizing social housing, underscoring the urgency of new solutions.

Ultimately, this event generated conversations on ways in which collaborative, resident-centered approaches redefine public housing and guide creation of more just and equitable social housing models—asserting affordable housing as a human right.

Skill Building



**Writing Workshop
with Gideon Fink Shapiro, Ph.D.**





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