

New York City Opportunity Agenda Workgroup Meetings

As part of the Council's efforts to develop their Opportunity Agenda City-wide, Council staff organized community stakeholders' meetings in each of the five boroughs. Non-profits, local development corporations, business improvement districts, chambers of commerce, business advocacy groups and other community stakeholders were invited to participate in discussions on how to help distressed communities overcome barriers to entry into the workforce.

In total, 126 people representing various organizations from across New York City participated in these meetings (see attached list of attendees). The meetings were generally an hour in length and consisted of the following: 1) an overview presentation of the Opportunity Agenda; 2) a discussion of the Council's approach to the Opportunity Agenda; 3) a summary of the programs offered in the CFA to complement the Opportunity Agenda; and 4) a facilitated discussion lead by Council staff of the various challenges and opportunities in connecting distressed communities to the region's economic life.

Meeting Schedule

Bronx Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting
Thursday, July 11, 2013, 12:30 pm
Hostos Community College
450 Grand Concourse, Bronx NY 10451

Manhattan Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting
Wednesday, July 17, 2013, 1:30 pm
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New Building
524 West 59th Street, New York, NY 10019

Staten Island Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting
Thursday, July 25, 2013, 8:30 am
Staten Island Chamber of Commerce
130 Bay Street, Staten Island, New York 10301

Brooklyn Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting
Monday, July 29, 2013, 10:00 am
Brooklyn Borough Hall
209 Joralemon Street , Brooklyn, New York 11201

Queens Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting
Monday, July 29, 2013, 2:00 pm
Queens Borough Hall
120-55 Queens Boulevard, Kew Gardens, NY 11424

Meeting Summaries

Bronx

There was a widespread consensus that a lack of access to computers and the internet in the Bronx is a significant challenge to those seeking employment. Much of the information about training programs and job availability is listed online. Without access, residents are at a disadvantage. Having computer access available at community centers would be a huge improvement in connecting residents to these much needed resources.

It was suggested that training programs are a great way to teach people new skills, however, often times these programs do not translate into employment. By fostering partnerships between non-profit organizations and employers, internship opportunities can be created which can provide on the job training and can potentially lead to future employment. One participant stated there was also a need to attract and keep new businesses in the South Bronx.

Another participant stated that transportation and safety are big concerns for those thinking of opening businesses in the area. That person added that if we can address those issues, new business ventures will provide more job opportunities for local residents.

The issue of learning the necessary skills to retain a job once employed was raised several times. Workers often have to deal with conflicting responsibilities – such as transportation or childcare – that can make their work lives extremely stressful. This was noted as a problem that disproportionately effects formerly incarcerated individuals. Someone suggested a program that created a back-up system where workers are paired with mentors who they can go to for help. These mentors can help them work through complications that arise in their personal or professional lives and find practical ways to handle especially difficult situations instead of those persons not showing up for work. Additional programs that were suggested included those that teach people the “soft” skills necessary for employment, such as how to dress, how to manage stress, etc.

Manhattan

Several participants suggested that there is a need for a holistic approach to workforce development, which should include “soft” skills training. One person added that programs that teach interview skills, help people dress appropriately, and provide support for new employees must be included in job training.

It was also suggested that there is a need for providing people with financial assistance for day-to-day expenses – such as transportation or childcare – that may be preventing them from finding and holding on to a job. Financial literacy can help people’s ability to maintain employment. Without proper counseling, people can find themselves in tenuous financial situations requiring them to go to court and risk losing their jobs.

With regards to funding for training programs, allowable expenses for administrative costs were a point of contention. Some felt that too much money was going into the administration of these training programs instead of direct assistance to people in need, while others felt that administrative costs were already being cut, and in turn, this was making it harder for the training organizations to hire the best talent.

Some participants noted an important distinction between a community need-based and individual need-based approach to funding. Some funding levels are determined on a community level, based on perceived need (i.e., census tracts). Due to this, communities that have individuals that are financially stable are given less funding. However, this ignores those people within those communities that are still struggling. An example of this was Bedford-Stuyvesant, where there has been economic growth, but many individuals are still unemployed and struggling. It was suggested that funding be done more at the individual level, rather than broad-scale community level.

Another participant suggested that there needs to be stronger connections and linkages between employers and non-profits. There was a general sense among the participants that there is a disconnect between the needs of employers and “hard” skills training. It was noted that by creating partnerships, groups can focus on preparing individuals for jobs that are available.

Staten Island

The general consensus from the Staten Island meeting, which was composed primarily of business owners and other business professionals, was that there needed to be more trade school alternatives for non-traditional students. It was felt that college is very expensive and is not necessarily the right path for everyone. High schools in Staten Island used to offer trade school classes for students to take and receive credits. Some complained that the Bloomberg administration had closed many of the city’s trade schools. Again, the general feeling was that there is a demand for specialized training in Staten Island, and that is why it is important to revive those programs.

As construction used to be the dominant trade and employer on the island, with its diminished role, it was felt that government should find ways to reinvent those opportunities with green buildings and manufacturing. It was mentioned that Staten Island also has a lot of potential to support the maritime industry, but the issue of high tolls was discussed as a challenge.

Participants suggested that there was also a need to address the devastating effects of Hurricane Sandy and how that has affected people’s employment. Paul Duffy from the Governor’s office discussed the Community Reconstruction Zones program, which will empower the local communities and give them a voice in determining the rebuilding strategies.

Brooklyn

Through comments made by several participants, it was clear many believed that real estate and land use were two big issues hindering economic development in Brooklyn. The high cost of land makes it difficult for small businesses and manufacturers to set up shop in the borough and instead there has been an influx of high-end residential developments and expensive hotels. The high cost of new construction causes companies to seek existing buildings elsewhere, which makes Brooklyn a less competitive option than many regions upstate (especially for manufacturing companies). It was felt that there is a need for government incentives for manufacturing companies to start construction in Brooklyn.

Another participant suggested that existing zoning and land use restrictions have also made it difficult for communities like Brownsville and East New York to experience economic revitalization. Rezoning of the area would allow new types of businesses to open and employ local residents. Additionally, available space in downtown Brooklyn is incongruous with the needs of new startup companies looking for small spaces with short-term leases. It was felt that supporting projects – such as the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership – that would take on renovating these spaces, would increase the likelihood of businesses locating in Brooklyn. One participant suggested that there are also many organizations that have underused facilities – such as commercial kitchens – that could be utilized if there were better networks and connections between organizations' demands and the communities' supply.

It was suggested that it is necessary to focus on specific populations within the unemployed. The formerly incarcerated face unique challenges in job placement as many employers are reluctant and fearful to hire them. Staff mentioned New York State's "Work for Success", but there seems to be a lack of education about the program in Brooklyn. It was also felt that there needs to be a greater focus on the youth and how to place children on a path to getting jobs with a sustainable wage.

A representative from the Brooklyn SBDC (Small Business Development Center) suggested a lack of awareness and prevalence of misinformation is also a major problem. Many of the issues facing people looking to start businesses or find employment can be resolved with the help of the local small business development centers. However, not enough people are taking advantage of this information simply because they do not know it exists. Instead of creating new programs, he suggested increasing marketing efforts of existing initiatives can help maximize the efficiency and productivity of current resources.

With regard to funding programs, someone suggested that it is the non-profits and stakeholders who best know the challenges facing each community. Creating a pool of money for these organizations to access and appropriately allocate to projects would better serve the communities' needs. Measurable outcomes would be a condition of funding, but there was a strong belief of more direct community input into these programs.

A participant from Coney Island noted there was a concern that many people in the community are trained and willing to work, but there simply are no jobs available. Construction, at one

point, was a large employer in the area, but that has since diminished. There was a request to have the Regional Council identify industries that are in demand and support those companies to set up in Brooklyn.

Queens

One participant felt that Queens as a borough was not getting its fair share of resources and investment. He stated that there is a lack of facilities for workforce development in parts of Queens, especially in the Rockaways. The only facilities that exist currently are the Workforce1 Career Centers. However, it was felt that these centers are focused on helping already successful high school and college students, instead of those who are more in need. Another participant suggested that this weakness was highlighted, not caused, by super-storm Sandy.

Another participant suggested the city's investment in Roosevelt Island could be expanded to other parts of Queens as well. This expansion could include projects such as an incubator in York College (where the space is available), which could provide many opportunities for the borough in the short and long term.

There was a great deal of focus on preparing the youth for the workforce. Most training programs are aimed at 18 years old and older. However, many participants felt that starting even earlier would be more beneficial. Some ideas that were brought up included bringing back vocational training to high schools that would give students real work skills that are necessary to find employment. Also, using retired workers— such as electricians and machinists – to teach students would be a great way to help them learn valuable skills and secure apprenticeships in unions. Incentivizing kids to stay in high school by bringing back activities such as marching band and sports would help keep students through graduation and would decrease their likelihood of being uneducated and unemployed.

There was a strong belief that more power should be in the hands of the non-profits, who know what their neighborhoods need and how to properly implement their ideas. One participant felt that the income in his community was too high to qualify for the low-income funding the state gives out, but he still felt there was a lot of need. Others complained that there are a lot of great programs in Queens that are not being adequately funded.

It was mentioned that it is important to address the complexity of the issues the unemployed population is facing. For instance, many residents experience personal issues such as domestic violence and lack of childcare. People are often unable to keep their jobs because they have problems such as anxiety and depression that are often overlooked and exasperated during the job placement process. Understanding this can help make our training programs more responsive to trainees' needs.

Increasing public-private partnerships were mentioned as a great way to gain funding to place trainees on a path of employment. Social impact bonds were also suggested as a way to prevent wasteful spending and only promote those programs that prove to be successful.

Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting Attendees**Bronx Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting****REDC-NYC**

Zayne Abdessalam RWDSU

State Resource Team

Melissa Alexander	Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
Lauren Bierman	Empire State Development
Merrill Hesch	NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Fred Landa	Department of State
John Moye	Department of Labor
Joseph Tazewell	Empire State Development
Veronica Webster	NYS Office of National and Community Service

General Public

Karen Bulthuis	Seedco
Joy Cole-Johnson	North Eastern Expansion Development Corp.
Sheryl Commodore	Concourse Village Inc.
Laura Daley	East Side House
Daniel Diaz	East Side House
Beth Dunphe	Metropolitan College of New York
Richard Garey	Manhatta Architecture
Moyse Grunfield	Bronx River Alliance
Michelle Kim	The Father's Heart
Marla Krauss	Wildlife Conservation Society
Brandon Lora	Friends with Brook Park
Madeline Martinez	Georgetown
Sheila Mashack	The Resource Training Center
David Modesto	WHEDco
Eileen Newman	Center for Bronx Non-Profits
Francis Onukwue	Hi-Tech Charities
Erika Pula	NAICA
Julia Roberts	WHEDco

Lucie	Tripon	Rated SR
Debra	Wheat	NYC & Company
Lauren	Winston-McPherson	Neighborhood Defender Service Of Harlem

Staten Island Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting

State Resource Team

Lauren	Bierman	Empire State Development
John	Moye	Department of Labor
Joseph	Tazewell	Empire State Development

General Public

Mike	Assenza	Statland Security
Dean	Balsamini	SBDC at CSI
Allen	Bentson	Bentson Insurance
Clair	Bisignano Chesnoff	Claire Properties
Anthony	Carro	Point Vantage LLC
Loretta	Cauldwell	West Brighton LDC
Solomon	Chemo	Wealth Advisors
Glen	Cutrona	Cutrona Architects
Philip	Guarnieri	Empire State Bank
Max	Joel	Solar One/NYSERDA
Tim	McGovern	Sandy Hook Pilots
Carole	Reiss	Staten Island Green Charter School of Environmental Discovery
Natalie	Risamo	Verizon
Joseph	Sciame	St. John's University
Michelle	Sledge	Northfield Community LCD
Joseph	Tornello	Meals on Wheels of Staten Island

Brooklyn Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting

REDC-NYC

Zayne	Abdessalam	RWDSU
Kai	Feder	Office of Brooklyn Borough President
Marty	Markowitz	Brooklyn Borough President

State Resource Team

Lauren	Bierman	Empire State Development
Nina	DiSalvo	Department of State
John	Moye	Department of Labor
Joe	Tazewell	Empire State Development

General Public

Meredith	Almeida	Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership
Jonathan	Bissell	Medgar Evers College
Nathan	Bliss	NYCEDC/Coney Island
Katie	Codey	NYC Council
Luis	Colon	Brooklyn Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Patrick	Condren	86BID
Georganna	Deas	Astella Development Corp.
Richard	Drucker	Brooklyn Navy Yard
Dyllon	Gibbs	Grand St. BID
Hunter	Goldman	Speaker's Office NYC Council
Chrystelle	Henri	Flatbush Nostrand Junction BID
Cecil	Henry	Calvery Community Church
Vilma	Heramia	Carroll Gardens Association, Inc.
Lowell	Herschberger	Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
Rasmia	Kirmani-Frye	Brownsville Partnership/Community Solutions
Julian	Klus	Community Solutions
Mary	Kuhn	SBIDC
Shai	Lauros	Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
Eric	Levy	Astella Development Corp.
Tondalaya	London	Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce
Katie	Lyon	Downtown Brooklyn Partnership
Lexy	Mayers	Brooklyn Public Library
Michelle	McClymont	Flatbush Nostrand Junction BID
David	Meade	SBIDC
Sam	Moskowitz	Midwood Development Corporation
Daniel	Murphy	Putkin Avenue BID
Jeanette	Nigro	Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce
Joanne	Oplustil	CAMBA, Inc.
Robert	Piecholin	SBDC
Kerwin	Pilgrim	Brooklyn Public Library
Simone	Rodriguez-Dorestant	Medgar Evers College
Gary	Sutnick	CAMBA, Inc.
Tamecca	Tillard	Coalition for the Improvement of Bedford-Stuyvesant
Malina	Tran	Downtown Brooklyn Partnership
Bill	Wilkins	Local Development Corporation East New York

Queens Opportunity Agenda Work Group Meeting

REDC-NYC

Melva	Miller	Office of Queens Borough President
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State Resource Team

Lauren	Bierman	Empire State Development
John	Moye	Department of Labor
Joe	Tazewell	Empire State Development

General Public

Kevin	Alexander	Rockaway Development and Revitalization Corporation
Shurn	Anderson	Queens Borough Presidents Office
Vincent	Arcuri	Community Board 5 - Queens
Seth	Bornstein	Queens Economic Development Corporation
Michael	Butler	Richmond Hill East Business Corp
Ricardi	Calixle	Queens Economic Development Corporation
Gregg	Cavaluzzi	Fortune Society
Donna	Doty	Queens Borough Public Library
Kristy	Grammer	Upwardly Global
Glenn	Greenidge	Farmers Boulevard Community Development Corp
James	Heyliger	Association of Minority Enterprises of New York
Tenaja	Jordan	Fortune Society
Philippa	Karteron	Council for Airport Opportunity
Hoong Yee Lee	Krakauer	Queens Council on the Arts
Sara	Medlicott	Queens Public Library
Debra	Mesloh	Long Island City Partnership
Franklin	Morawski	Queens Economic Development Corporation
Herlema	Owens	Association of Women Construction Workers of America
Laura	<u>Senkevitch</u>	Fortune Society
Aimee	Simpierre	Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement
Pintso	Topgay	Workforce1
Nakita	Vanstory	Laguardia Community College