

COLUMBIA  
**GSAPP**

# Humanizing the Interborough Express

Designing a Blueprint for Engagement  
in Transit Oriented Development

PREPARED IN MAY 2023

IN CONSULTATION WITH



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# Introduction

For the second semester of the Urban Planning Program at Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation (GSAPP), students are required to participate in a "Studio." The studio course gives students an opportunity to work with client(s) on a real-world planning-related project to address a term-long objective. Students learn quantitative and qualitative research; undertake community outreach; facilitate collaboration and communication with stakeholders and client(s); and work within a dynamic team setting.

The 14-week studio concludes with a formal written report and a final presentation of findings and recommendations for the client(s). The report and presentation aim to assess the current conditions of the client's needs, identify key problems, and analyze stakeholders' positionalities. From this, the studio team constructs a framework on how to approach a planning problem and advises the client(s) on how they could proceed in addressing their problem. The studio experience pairs classroom learning with practical experience.

The following report chronicles the course Urban Planning Studio PLANA6911\_003: "The Future Interborough Express (IBX) and its Impact on Outer Borough NYC," instructed by Jenna Dublin and Jeffrey Shumaker and by teaching assistant Jim Lammers. The studio was held in Fayweather Hall 203, with sessions occurring every Wednesday from January 18th, 2023, to May 3rd, 2023, from 3 pm to 7 pm EST.

"The Future Interborough Express (IBX) and its Impact on Outer Borough NYC"—otherwise known as "The IBX Studio"—was tasked with facilitating a conversation between the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and New York City's Department of City Planning (NYCDPC) Queens and Brooklyn offices to navigate the decision-making processes of transit-oriented development (TOD).



# Studio Goal

The Interborough Express is a new light rail rapid transit system that will connect areas of Brooklyn and Queens and utilize an existing freight rail right-of-way. The MTA and the Queens and Brooklyn NYCDOP offices are key planners of the project and our studio clients. At the beginning of the semester, we met with the leadership of these agencies. We were presented with the problem of connectivity for the IBX's proposed stations in the major transit areas of Jackson Heights in Queens and Middle Village and Broadway Junction in Brooklyn. For example, the new light rail in Jackson Heights could further disrupt traffic and pedestrian flow on congested Roosevelt Avenue. The light rail may require tunneling under All Faiths Cemetery in Middle Village.

Our clients primarily desired design and engineering solutions to these connectivity problems. The studio course also focused on public engagement in city planning. To determine a direction for this project, we asked ourselves, is there an opportunity to establish a robust foundation for community engagement, relationship building, and inclusive development, given the early stage of the IBX project?

We then coalesced these questions into the problem statement: *"How can we amplify the grassroots stories of the communities that the IBX will serve?"* And how can we ensure these stories are heard and incorporated into the transportation planning process? Uniquely, the IBX will bring transit to historically underserved communities.

Our research and discussions with key stakeholders shaped our research question, *"How can we humanize the IBX?"* We decided to approach the idea of *"Humanizing"* through community engagement. Thus, as part of our studio goals, we pursued a range of engagement methods to create rational and experiential aims that we identified as beneficial to inclusive transportation planning. The engagement methods utilized by the studio were also informed by neighborhood characteristics and sought to provide data to inform the implementation of projects of a magnitude as expansive as the IBX.



# What is the IBX?



The Interborough Express, or IBX, is a transformative new transit project that will see New York gain its first new train line since World War II.

Our studio project centers on the Interborough Express or IBX, a transformative light rail rapid transit project in New York City that will address an important problem: the need for more efficient public transit connectivity between Brooklyn and Queens. Currently, if a subway rider wants to travel from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, to Jackson Heights, Queens, that person would need to travel through Manhattan as their most efficient route for a total travel time of about 90 minutes. With the IBX, that rider's end-to-end travel time would be reduced to less than 40 minutes. The IBX light rail will connect with 17 subway lines across 19 subway stations and the Long Island Rail Road. Overall, it is estimated that the IBX will serve at least 115,000 riders per week (MTA 2023).



Governor Kathy Hochul announced the Interborough Express in her State of the State Address on January 5th, 2023, and she directed the MTA to begin an environmental review. The Interborough Express will be NYC's first new train line in decades. It is planned to be a light rail and it will utilize the Bay Ridge Branch, an existing 14-mile freight train corridor that cleaves through the boroughs (Ibid) and owned by the LIRR and CSX. Using existing rail infrastructure means the Interborough Express can be built more quickly and efficiently. It will also preserve the Bay Ridge Branch's use as a freight line, providing an opportunity to connect to the Port Authority's Cross-Harbor Freight Project. It is projected that the passenger rail and the freight will be able to exist side-by-side (StreetsBlog 2022).



# What is the IBX?

## 17

Different Subway Lines, plus the LIRR

## 40 mins

End to end travel time along the IBX route

Importantly, the IBX will reach some of the most underserved residents in the outer boroughs. The projected ridership for the line is 115,000 weekday passengers, which is at a level comparable with other crosstown connectors such as the growing G train (average of 150,000 daily riders) (Fitzsimmons, 2016) and enough to make it the highest ridership for a new transit line in the US over the last two decades (MTA 2023). The IBX corridor also passes through neighborhoods with poor existing transit connections and even communities with no subway access, cutting travel time significantly for many riders in Brooklyn and Queens (MTA 2023). Therefore, the IBX could also be considered as a massive investment in transit equity in favor of the communities it serves; it can potentially also help to decrease VMT and lower emissions.

As the populations of Brooklyn and Queens individually exceed Manhattan's, and as job growth causes residents to make more commutes within and between the two boroughs—as opposed to commutes through Manhattan—the IBX is a necessary expansion that will unlock the enormous potential of both boroughs. Additionally, the IBX has the potential to “enhance entire neighborhoods and strengthen Brooklyn and Queens as a whole” (MTA 2023).

However, the project does neglect one other nearby borough, the Bronx. The original Triboro RX plan proposed by the Regional Plan Association (on which the IBX proposal is based) saw the line extend north into the Bronx, terminating at Co-op City (RPA | Interborough Express, n.d.). However, the MTA's Penn Access project, which would see Metro-North trains travel over the Hell Gate Bridge into Penn Station, precludes the IBX from traveling over the same bridge due to space constraints (Schneider, 2022). Many Bronx residents, electeds, and stakeholders are unhappy with this reasoning, arguing that leaving the Bronx out of the proposal ignores transit deserts in the Bronx and makes the project fall short of its full potential (Ibid.). Though many commentators, including the RPA, commend the MTA for beginning to study the Brooklyn-Queens route (Ibid.).

# History and Existing Conditions



The proposed location of the IBX route advances the transformation of two underutilized freight lines into passenger rail service.

The rail line opened in 1876 as the Bay Ridge branch of the New York, Bay Ridge, & Jamaica Railroad to reach the Fresh Pond Junction and connect to the Long Island Rail Road's Montauk service. While it was first intended as a passenger railroad, service ceased by 1925 with the decline of rail. In turn, it became electrified to accommodate freight service which continued to 1968 when trains switched to diesel power instead.

Currently, the rail line is divided with the Fremont Secondary operated by a subsidiary of CSX and the southern portion owned by the LIRR and operated by the New York & Atlantic Railroad. The line now serves freight clients with the transfer of materials. A single round-trip freight train operates each day.

In accordance with Regional Plan Association recommendations, studies have been enacted to explore alternatives to better utilize this route.



# Demographic Analysis

The area which the IBX will serve is a diverse community of languages, backgrounds, occupations, and incomes.

According to Census Bureau data, the neighborhoods along the route are home to a very diverse population with global roots and varying economic mobility. Approximately 48% lack a bachelor's degree, while 13% have not received a high school diploma. 74.22% report being non-white background and 50.30% speak English at less than very well proficiency.

This disparity in attainment shows the need for increased access to education, college/career readiness, vocational training, language classes, and expanded opportunities for transit in order to obtain work. As roughly half of households in this study area lack ownership of a car, their mobility options are limited. The establishment of additional rail options will have a dramatic change in the livelihoods of residents and visitors alike.



0.5 Mile Buffer Surrounding the IBX

# Timeline

The following timeline outlines the work done by the studio class over 16 weeks, including but not limited to stakeholder meetings, presentations and report development, and community engagement activities.

- **Jan 18, 2023**  
Engagement workshop and course introduction
- **Jan 25, 2023**  
Client Meeting with Michael Shiffer, Senior Vice President, Metropolitan Transport Authority (MTA) Regional Planning
- **Feb 1, 2023**  
Client Meeting with Sagi Golan, Urban Designer at Department of City Planning (DCP) Brooklyn Office and Jonathan Keller, Deputy Director, DCP Queens Office
- **Feb 8, 2023**  
Preparation of Studio Manifesto
- **Feb 15 - Feb 22, 2023**  
Preparation for Midterm Review presentation
- **Mar 1, 2023**  
Midterm Review
- **Mar 8, 2023**  
Midterm Review debrief and meeting with Angela Bellisio and Laura Smith, Transportation and Analytics Division, DCP Brooklyn Office
- **Mar 15, 2023**  
Spring Break
- **Mar 29, 2023**  
Client review session with Michael Shiffer, MTA, Sagi Golan, DCP Brooklyn Office, and Jonathan Keller, DCP Queens Office
- **Apr 5, 2023**  
Meeting with Emily Weidenhof, Director of Public Space, NYC Department of Transportation and Danny Pearlstein, Riders' Alliance
- **April 12 - 19, 2023**  
Community Engagement preparation
- **Apr 23, 2023**  
Community Engagement at Diversity Plaza, Jackson Heights
- **Apr 26, 2023**  
Final Review and Report preparation and Community Engagement at Diversity Triangle, Jackson Heights, Jackson Heights-Roosevelt Ave Station, and Subway
- **May 3, 2023**  
Final Review

# Opportunity

It is one thing to situate the IBX within the existing urban fabric, but who are the individuals and communities whose lives may be radically transformed by the IBX?

Given that the IBX is still at an early stage of its development, there is an unprecedented opportunity for the MTA and DCP to establish a robust foundation for community engagement, relationship building, and inclusive development that provides new approaches to transportation planning practice in New York City.



# The Clients

## MTA



The MTA was interested in the intersection between community engagement and physical station design with an added emphasis on co-design narratives. The MTA has done preliminary engagement work in some of the communities along the corridor, and the inclusion of more co-design narratives will help augment that existing work. Therefore, our studio has designed engagement activities to foster such practices and provide our clients with appropriate implementation options.

## DCP



The DCP is also interested in the intersection between the physical station and the community fabric of which it is a part. The IBX can potentially transform the surrounding neighborhoods considerably, and properly studied community engagement tools that allow residents to interact with the planning process meaningfully are indispensable. The DCP has contributed to robust community engagement practices and neighborhood studies in East Harlem and Gowanus. Our studio also aims to augment such models and provide DCP with even more engagement tools.

# The Team

Our studio represents multidisciplinary backgrounds ranging from design to policy, and multicultural backgrounds from New York, to Mexico, and to the Philippines. As GSAPP Planning students, we have the capacity to be nimble, and take advantage of our unique position to mediate conversations between our clients and the public, facilitate awareness and education, and challenge the DCP and MTA to uphold the highest standard of engagement and consideration of grassroots perspectives.

## STUDENTS



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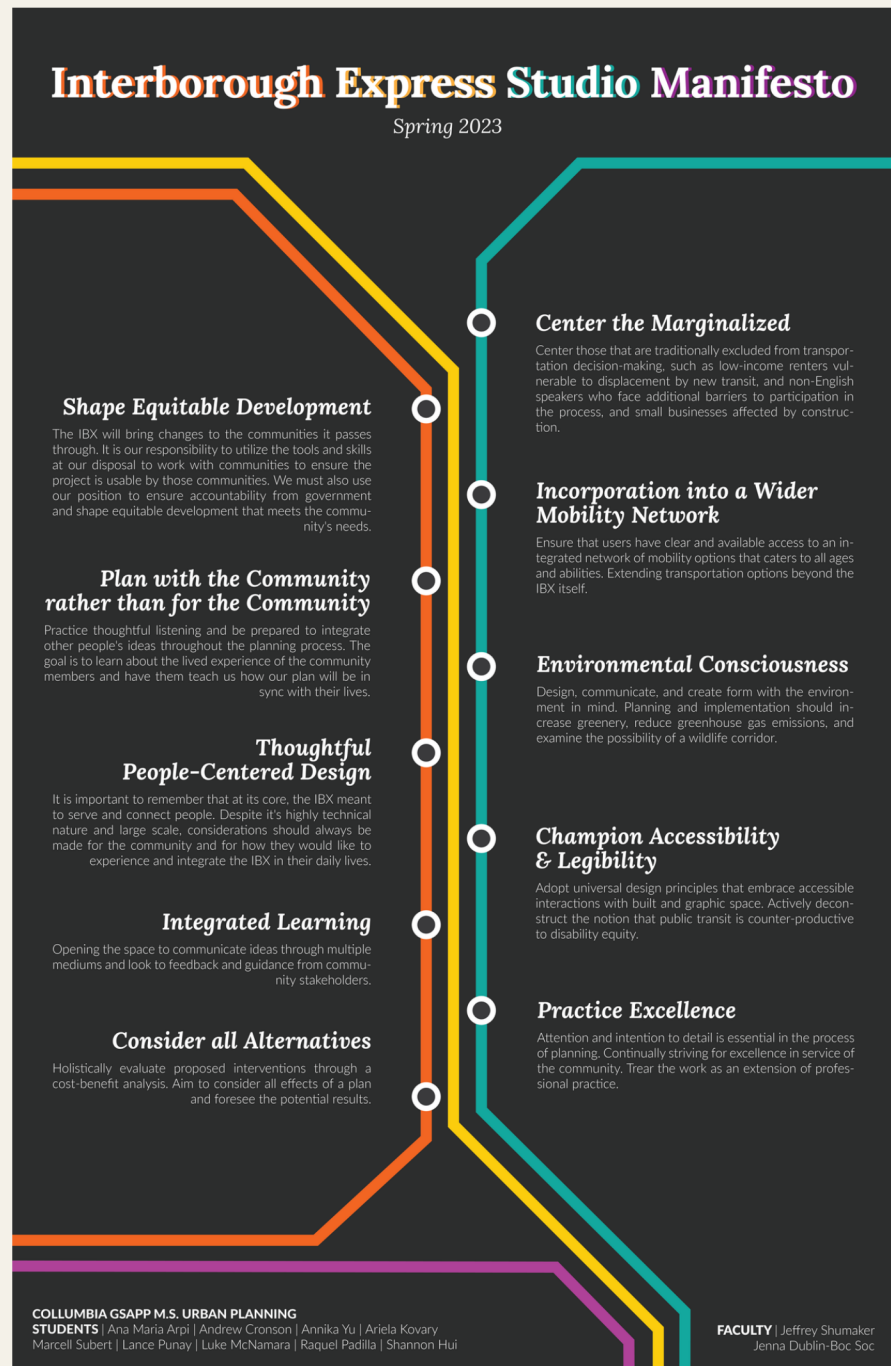
Jenna Dublin  
**Co-Instructor**



Jim Lammers  
**Teaching  
Assistant**

# Studio Manifesto

Before starting any work, we as a studio collectively established a manifesto that came to guide our conversations, research, and production for the semester. Our manifesto champions the importance of thoughtful people-centered design, accessibility, integrated learning, environmental consciousness, systems-thinking, and a commitment to centering communities that are traditionally marginalized or neglected in planning decision-making processes.





# Research Methods

## <sup>01</sup> Literature Review

Our analysis of engagement methods rested upon a thorough literature review of existing scholarship on participatory planning models. These existing works were then organized into a matrix to help us visualize and operationalize our engagement proposals.

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## <sup>02</sup> Statistical Analysis

To better understand the community that the IBX will serve and the public that our engagement would target, we dove into some statistical analysis of the demographics along the corridor. This analysis also informed our preparations for our community engagements, such as the languages we needed to translate for any materials we provided.

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## <sup>03</sup> Spatial Mapping

During our research, we settled upon various spatial mapping exercises as core means of engagement with community members. These methods would allow meaningful spatial community participation and provide valuable data about local sentiments.

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## <sup>04</sup> Interviews

Throughout our engagement process, we used formal and informal interviews of community stakeholders to supplement our other data. These semi-structured conversations dug deeper at topics brought up by community stakeholders that otherwise may have gone unexplored.

# Theoretical Questions

In thinking about how we wanted to approach "humanizing" the IBX, a number of theoretical questions came to define our conception of the project. If we want to center the community, then what is our role as planners? How is effective engagement constructed? How does our position as students impact our ability to engage? Listed below are some examples of these considerations that framed our project.

*If centering the community is our purpose, what is our role as planners in this project?*

*How is engagement currently conducted for transportation planning projects, and where are the gaps?*

*What are the considerations that frame effective community engagement? Where are the gaps?*

*What is the most effective way to amplify marginalized voices? Do these techniques leave out any other voices?*

*How does our position as GSAPP students shape our capacity to engage as well as how the community conceives of us?*

*How does a planner determine which community engagement method is used and in what context?*

# Understanding Engagement

Community engagement in the urban planning process has different implications depending on the reason for its implementation, the stakeholders involved and their respective positionalities, and the circumstances in which it operates. Therefore, within the context of our studio, it is important to deconstruct and explicitly define how we are, as aspiring planners, conceptualizing engagement to provide a robust foundation for its purpose and resultant operationalization.



# Why Community Engagement?

Why is it essential to engage the community?

The importance of public engagement and the key reasons for implementing it are often either lost in the haste to prepare adequate community engagement or disregarded in the effort to check a box. Therefore, in creating our methodology, we wanted to center the reasons planners embark on engagement in crafting our engagement methodology.

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The genesis of community engagement in modern planning stems from the post-war urban renewal period, in which excessive top-down planning resulted in many massive infrastructure decisions being made with almost no input from those it was meant to serve, often symbolized through the figure of Robert Moses. The dissatisfaction with this method and the writings of researchers such as Sherry Arnstein resulted in the establishment of new forms of planning practice, such as the creation of community boards and the mandating of public hearings as a part of the development process in New York's 1963 Charter (Marcuse 1987). The main objective behind these efforts, and the vast majority of community engagement activities, is to increase transparency and inclusivity and open up the planning process through dialogue between policymakers and those whom the project will impact. This would lead to plans producing more equitable outcomes (due to larger swaths of the population being involved) and more complementary to local community needs (Fainstein and Lubinsky 2020). Engagement is also executed to include groups historically excluded from the planning process, limiting isolation and alienation (Ibid).

# Challenges to Community Engagement

*How do we determine what residents we are targeting? How do we choose strategies, locations, and time that complement our aims?*

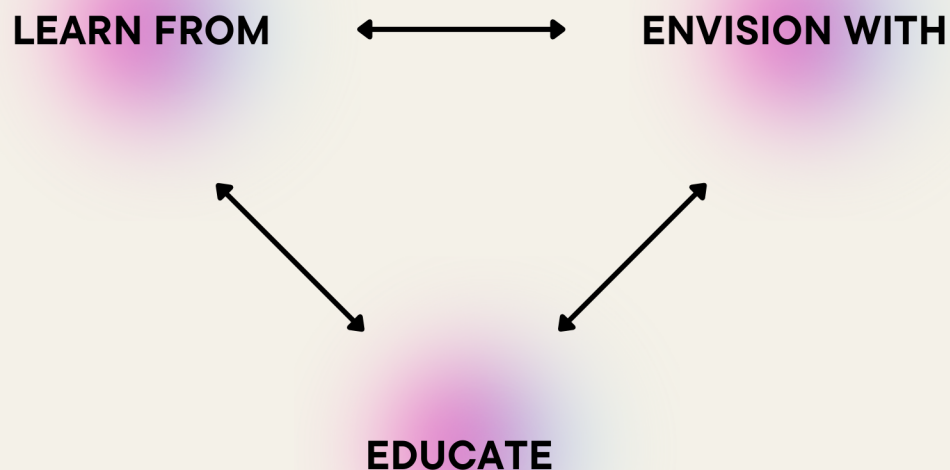
*Accounting for our position as students and outsiders when conducting engagement, and the impact these considerations have on the data we can collect.*

*The disconnect between engagement and implementation poses a significant challenge. Engagement can serve as a form of tokenism in that it demonstrates a strive for inclusivity and equity, but its recommendations can easily be discarded.*

*The size and diversity of New York inherently creates a power imbalance among certain individuals/groups. Despite efforts to maximize inclusion, upper and middle-class interests can still easily dominate the conversation.*

# Redesigning Community Engagement

To complement the MTA's approach to public outreach, we redesigned the conventional process with a three-part framework to manifest deeper reciprocity between the project proposer and the public responder. Going beyond the notice-hearing/meeting-application framework, we intended to center experiential methods to form our engagements' intentions of accessibility, visual appeal, and objectives of being tactile and understandable. These intentions were distilled into our three-part framework: educating, learning, and envisioning. This means educating the community to provide information on the IBX, learning from the community, including what they already know about the project, and envisioning how the IBX will contribute to their community fabric.





# Positionality

As GSAPP Planning students, we have the capacity to be nimble and take advantage of our unique position to mediate conversations between our clients and the public, facilitate awareness and education, and challenge city agencies to uphold the highest standard of engagement and consideration of grassroots perspectives.

# Key Considerations in Engagement

Critical factors for effective and successful community engagement should underscore the community's unique characteristics. Factors include considering how to tailor strategies, build meaningful relationships, maintain open communication, ensure equity and inclusivity, and evaluate strategies to achieve desired outcomes.

## **Understand the community's unique characteristics**

Gain knowledge about culture, history, demographics, and needs to inform an engagement approach

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## **Tailor engagement strategies to address specific community needs**

Each community is different, and ensure flexibilities in both approach and method

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## **Establish trust and foster meaningful relationships with community members**

Transparency, accountability, and collaboration is crucial for successful and meaningful engagement

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## **Maintain open and transparent communication throughout the process**

Ensure that all stakeholders are informed and have opportunities to provide input and feedback

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## **Ensure inclusion and equity in the engagement process to engage all voices**

Engagement strategies should consider diverse perspectives and equitably distribute impact

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## **Fairly distribute the benefits and impacts of planning decisions**

Community members who may be disproportionately affected should be handled with sensitivity

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## **Commit to ongoing evaluation and adaptation of engagement strategies**

Evaluate outcomes regularly and consistently to identify areas for improvement over time

# Operationalizing Engagement

With a clear understanding of how our definitions of engagement and its values may differ from traditional planning practices, we can move towards operationalizing and strategizing what methodologies to apply in our outreach efforts to achieve communication, implementation, and measurement.



# Experiential Aims

Our experiential aims were thought of to be inclusive. We wanted to construct an environment where the participants could find various options to engage with and choose the one(s) more suited to their needs.

## Education

Sharing the basics of the IBX so the participants could walk away having learned something about the project.

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## Visuals

Images were important to draw the attention of passersby and as a universal language of communication.

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## Tactility

Touching engagement provided participants with a more robust experience and facilitated communication and sharing ideas.

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## Accessibility

The language barrier was one of the more important challenges to overcome; having information previously translated was crucial for our engagement.

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## Fun and Excitement

We wanted our engagement to be a pleasant experience where ideas and dialogue would flow through the enjoyment of participation.

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## Feeling Heard

It was important to transmit empathy with the people we are engaging, acknowledge their sentiments and concerns, and give them hope that their voices will be considered in future planning processes.

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## Opportunity for Continuity

Some people were interested in keeping track of the project, so we shared the IBX media already produced by the MTA so they could continue being informed beyond this activity.

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## Trust-building and Transparency

We had to always be clear about our position as students at Columbia University GSAPP. This avoided creating false expectations but also offered the possibility of eliciting sincere feedback from the public.

# Rational Aims

Our rational aims centered around finding practical means of engaging community members in a symbiotic process. This mutually-beneficial process is a cycle where the community is informed of the project and then provides feedback that our clients can use, which then creates opportunities for new concerns and feedback to be voiced by the community.

## <sup>01</sup> Informing

Not all of the participants in our engagement process were familiar with the IBX or knew very much about it. We created explanatory posters and literature that provided basic information on the project in a neutral way to prime participants for engagement.

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## <sup>02</sup> Learning From

Members of the community have valuable insight to offer. Often, many of the issues that seem insignificant to the planner may be of more importance to the residents. Even small issues, like the once-daily garbage train along the future IBX right-of-way, are important quality of life issues for residents.

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## <sup>03</sup> Co-Designing With

The design of the new IBX infrastructure can take important cues from those in Jackson Heights who will be using it daily. Our 3D map activity sought to identify those places where various new facilities or changes to old ones were most desired.

# Questions to Operationalize

## Practical

*How should the stations and streetscape be designed?*

*What are some perceived risks toward the built environment?*

*What are some community-raised alternatives for technical challenges?*

*What are the gaps in knowledge?*

## Emotional

*What are people's greatest concerns about the project's construction?*

*How do people feel the IBX would impact the built environment?*

*How do people feel about the IBX?*

*What do they already know about the IBX?*



# Methodological Considerations

The components of our methodology involved careful consideration of numerous factors that each contributed to our goal of centering the most vulnerable citizens who could be impacted by the IBX. Community engagement is not only about who or what is included, but about what is left out in the creation of a narrative. The core values that we outlined in our manifesto helped us determine how to answer these sometimes difficult methodological questions.

## Who represents the "community"

Our goal was to include a diverse array of voices representing vulnerable or marginalized individuals

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## Community Partnerships

We sought out community organizations with deep roots in the area of study

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## Location

We visited numerous sites to find one where the IBX would have the greatest impact on the community

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## Group Size

We sought to cultivate a large enough sample to adequately represent community interests

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## Accessibility

We were determined to make our study accessible to people of all backgrounds with multilingual engagement materials

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## Date and Time

We implemented our engagements at various times of the day and week to maximize participation

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## Consent

We always sought out consent for all participation and documentation of engagement activities

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## Life Cycle

We considered the purpose of our anticipated findings beyond the scope of the engagement activity

# Matrix

In order to approach community engagement we did research on existing engagement techniques and types. We manufactured a "matrix" to be able to guide our decision on which types of engagements would be the most appropriate for the context of the IBX. This organizational framework addressed important "who," "what," "when," "where," and "why" considerations to then cultivate the "how," which meant the different engagement techniques.



## TACTICS

We wanted to include a wide variety of methods, both more traditional and unique, that could capture the spectrum of engagement.



## WHO

Helped us identify methods that could best bring out marginalized voices.



## WHY

The extent that our engagement has aims other than gathering community sentiment.



## WHERE

Location is a key factor in making sure all voices are heard and all members of the community have the ability to share input.



## WHEN

As the IBX is in an early stage of development, techniques that emphasized this were key to us.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATRIX										
	Criteria	Interactive Table	Co-building Narratives	Cognitive Mapping	Card Storming	Surveys	Wish Flag	Constructing & 3D-Collaging	Drop Box	Gallery Walk
What  <i>(What is the form of engagement)</i>	Description	A custom-built mobile activity table has map layering on the counter surface and/or a foot print of the desired study area. This surface of the table could also serve other engagement uses.	Constructing a collaborative narrative with participants that reflects a story/day in their life. This can be useful in informing how people conceive of a space or place (like MTA stations) and how they interact with it (like MTA stations). This can be useful in informing how people conceive of a space or place (like MTA stations) and how they interact with it (like MTA stations).	Asking residents to create a detailed mental map of the manner in which they interact with their environment. This can take the form of a drawing or other visual representation of a person's interaction with their environment. This can take the form of a drawing or other visual representation of a person's interaction with their environment.	An interactive form of engagement that allows participants to build their own narrative by asking open ended questions in individual settings and with small groups, and then building on the group and build consensus through the determination of the group's response. A very open ended form of engagement, cardstorming can be useful across many stages of the decision making process.	This activity will promote interaction with the community by asking questions of our interest that can serve the purpose of the project. Open questions can be used, however, all the questions should be open ended and designed to respond to maintain the respondents' interest.	Engaging a passerby about a public space that is desired to be improved. By picking a passerby, a project manager can get the greatest amount of foot traffic, a project manager would then ask a passerby to write down their response to a box.	Creating a three-dimensional collage activity that enables participants to build their own narrative by asking open ended questions in individual settings and with small groups, and then building on the group and build consensus through the determination of the group's response. A very open ended form of engagement, cardstorming can be useful across many stages of the decision making process.	Providing a space to have passerby to a box. They would then ask a passerby to write down their response to a box.	A gallery walk would be an educational tool that provides the participants the opportunity to learn about the project and the engagement way.
Why  <i>(Reasons for Engagement)</i>	Understand Values	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Hear Diverse Perspectives	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Exponential Check-in			X			X			
	Access Unapped Knowledge		X					X		X
	Risk Management			X			X		X	
	Evaluation				X	X	X		X	X
When  <i>(Decision Making Stage)</i>	Prioritization (Strategic)			X					X	
	Public Demand		X	X	X				X	
	Historical Injustices									
	Defining the Issue	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
	Gathering Information		X		X	X		X	X	X
	Establishing decision criteria							X		X
Where  <i>(Decision Making Stage)</i>	Developing Alternatives			X			X	X	X	
	Evaluating Alternatives			X			X		X	
	Making the Decision			X		X	X		X	
	Implementing the Decision									
	Evaluating the Decision									
	Project-Specific Meeting	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
Where  <i>(Location)</i>	Community Board Meeting	X	X		X			X	X	
	On the street (at random)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	At a set location on the street (booth, table, etc.)			X						
	Virtual Meeting/Engagement		X							
	Primary Groups (groups that represent citizens who are directly affected by a decision)					X				
	Secondary Groups (groups that have potential to reach both primary groups and individuals.)									
Who  <i>(Target Audience)</i>	Affected individuals (those citizens who are directly affected by a decision, but are not affiliated with an organized group)		X	X	X	X				
	General Public (those people who are personally interested and wish to contribute)		X	X	X	X		X	X	X



# Designing the Engagement

Having concluded the literature review for engagement options and after summarizing them in the matrix, we proceeded to design our own engagement in Jackson Heights.

The activities we selected stem from our previously established rational aims:

- **To Educate**, which materialized as a Gallery Walk activity with which we intended to inform the community about the project.
- **To Learn from**, which materialized as a Co-Building Narratives activity aiming to get better insights into the grassroots stories of the community and,
- **To Envision with**, which translated into a 3D Map with intentions to gather, map and understand the sentiments and desires of the community.

Each one of these activities will be further discussed in the coming sections of this report.



# Gallery Walk

Our Gallery Walk provided an on-the-spot visualization of the IBX project as well as descriptions of it in multiple languages. The board also served as a passive form of engagement for passersby who did not feel comfortable with engaging in the more hands-on portions of our setup. The board itself was also highly mobile and allowed us to efficiently move it to different locations throughout the area, including on the subway train itself back to Manhattan.







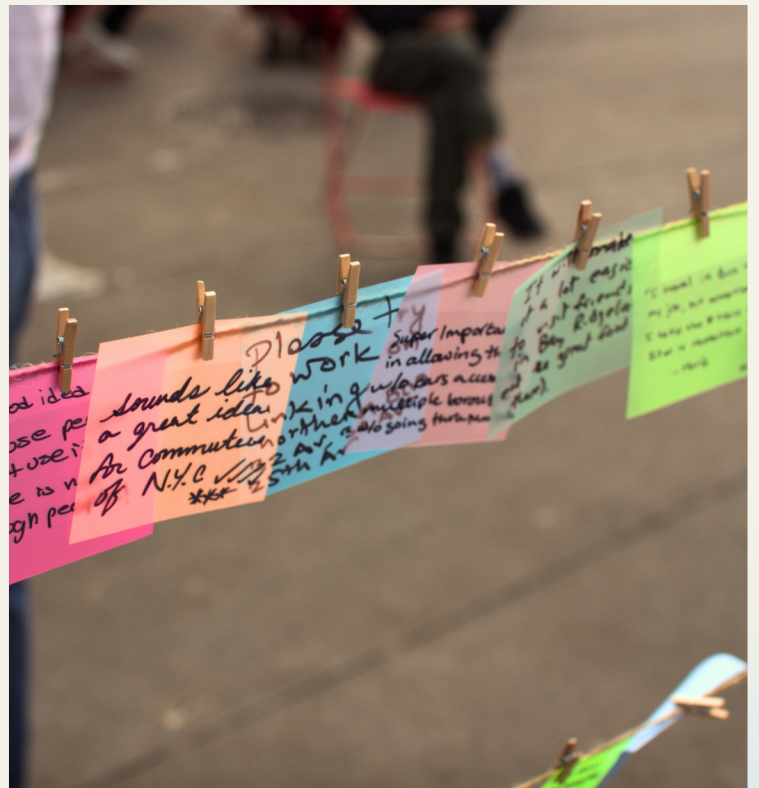


# Co-building Narratives

Our co-building narrative took a more interactive approach than the Walk Gallery activity. Participants were asked to respond to more open-ended prompts and write down their ideas for neighborhood improvements in the area and their life experiences with the coming of the IBX and existing facilities. These anonymous narratives were then strung on a wire for others to see and derive inspiration.



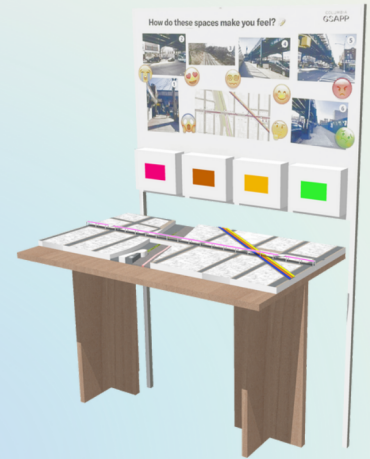




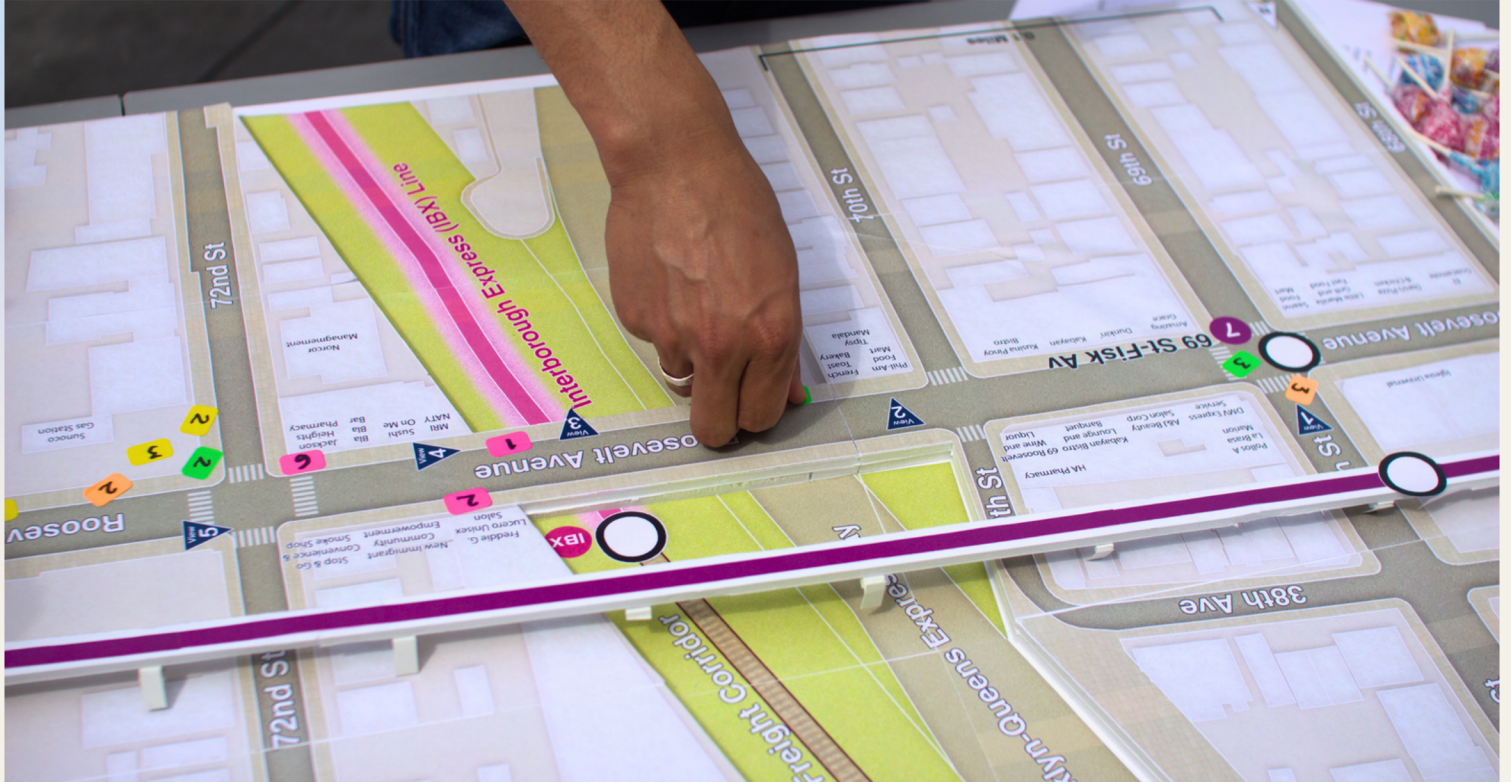


# 3D Map

The 3D Map worked in concert with a drop box and served as a three-dimensional visualization of the IBX corridor for participants. The display format was engaging for passersby and was quite popular among participants whether they used it for placing their stickers corresponding to drop box prompts or simply to look at and arrive at a better spatial understanding of the IBX in relation to existing transit facilities in the neighborhood.













# Engaging

How do we reconcile the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of engagement with its implementation in practice? Extraneous and unexpected variables are given in the process of interacting and working with people. Taking the effort to anticipate potential factors and scenarios in the process of planning for an engagement activity is integral to successful implementation—especially given the time and costs associated with the comprehensive process.

# Choosing the Site

Our goal was to find a site that represented a diverse array of stakeholders, interests and physical realities as a case study of our engagement methods.

For our initial site selection, we considered three sites: Broadway Junction, Middle Village and Jackson Heights. Broadway Junction was considered because of its intersection of several transit lines and stock of disused but developable space. Middle Village was considered due to the likelihood of the IBX running on-street in the neighborhood and the attendant disruption that may cause. Jackson Heights was considered because of its connection to multiple transit lines and the incredible diversity of the neighborhood itself, in terms of people and land uses. Ultimately, we felt that Jackson Heights not only combined some of the elements of the other two sites, but was the most diverse in scope. Jackson Heights, according to some of our background research into the community, also had numerous community organizations that we could partner with and engage as well as a consistent enough flow of people at Diversity Plaza to sustain a prolonged engagement activity.

# Material Sourcing

## Bought

All of our smaller equipment, including foam core, poster boards, stickers, string and candy were all bought from online retailers and shipped to GSAPP. While the foam core was our largest expense, we economized by tiling the images on the models instead of plotting them on a large-scale printer.

## Borrowed

For some of our larger items, such as tables, we turned to The Hort, a local community organization, and Street Lab, a non-profit equipment rental service for community events. We also used Facebook Marketplace to borrow a folding table for our 3D map. Our easels and picture frames were borrowed from the GSAPP lounge.

## Found

Some of the tables and chairs used during our community engagement exercises were found at Diversity Plaza among existing street furniture pieces. We made light use of such equipment to limit the impact of street furniture availability on local residents who traditionally use them. Many of our standard office supplies, like pens and paper, were found in the GSAPP lounge.

# Materials

Item	Station	Sourcing	Cost (USD\$)
Acrylic Holders	All	Bought	16.99
Twine	Co-Building Narratives	Bought	5.99
Clips	Co-Building Narratives	Bought	7.99
Post-Its	Co-Building Narratives	Bought	12.98
Stickers	3D Map	Bought	4.00
Foamcore	3D Map and Gallery Board	Bought	30
Tape	All	Bought	6
Tables	All	Borrowed	0
Chairs	All	Borrowed	0
Candy	All	Acquired	25
Chalk	All	Borrowed	0
Paper	All	Found	0
Pens	All	Found	0
Camera Kit	All	Borrowed	0
Frames	All	Found	0
Whiteboard	3D Map and Gallery Board	Borrowed	0
Dry Erase Film	Co-Building Narratives	Bought	7.99
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>110.94</b>



# Knowing the Space



At first glance, the hustle and bustle of Jackson Heights is difficult to take in at once. Before we undertook our engagement activity, we visited Jackson Heights multiple times in order to familiarize ourselves with the area before attempting to draw community members into our activity. We observed how locals used the space, particularly the mix between passive congregating at Diversity Plaza and another small plaza near the 7 train as well as many busy commuters and locals rapidly passing through. Such different uses of space required an engagement activity that would cater to both passive and active users. For this reason, both our passive components (the gallery walk) and well as the more interactive ones (co-building narratives and the 3D map drop box/sticker activity) attracted many users and allowed us to meaningfully engage with a wider variety of street users.



# Furniture

The street furniture needed for our activities were sourced from the GSAPP planning lounge, Facebook Marketplace as well as loaned from Street Lab. Our large folding table was sourced from Facebook, while the large, winding table with accompanying chairs was rented from Street Lab.





# Signage

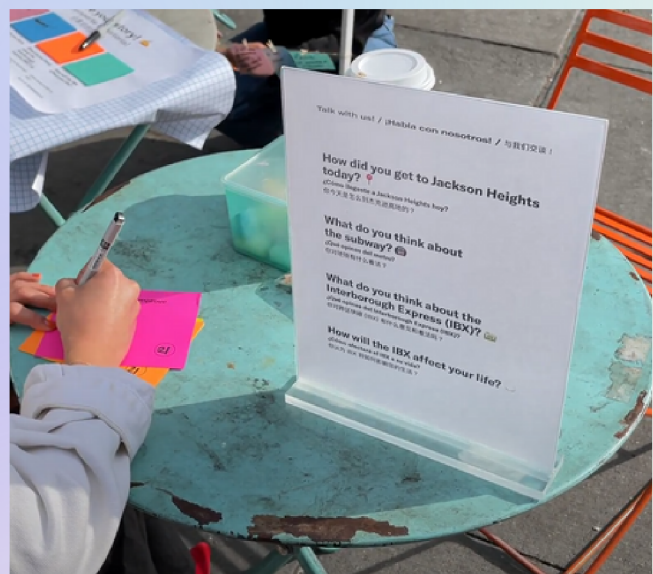
Our engagement setup included signage to direct potential participants to the various activities with evocative pronouncements like "come talk to us about the IBX." There was also relevant informational signage on the gallery walk that gave participants an explanation of the IBX project and our engagement activities.





# Instructions

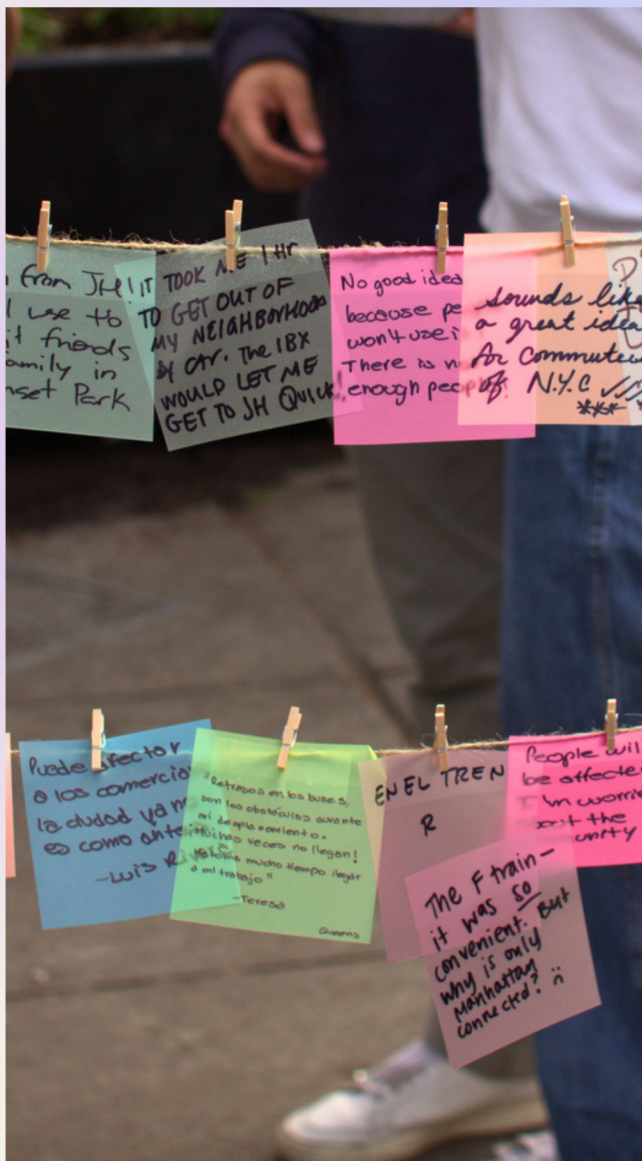
Instructions for our engagement activities were written out on our poster boards as well as explained verbally to participants. Our multilingual studio team was able to execute this latter effectively given the considerable linguistic diversity present at the site. Some components of the activity, like the drop box cards, had explanations and prompts written on them.





# Tactile Elements

Our engagement activities contained numerous tactile components, including the co-designing sticky notes, the magnet board, and the stickers on the 3D map. These tactile elements drew in more people and gave some of the more passive components of the project, such as the gallery walk, a slightly more active component.





# Offerings

Some elements of our engagement did not involve feedback or even the IBX at all, but were intended to draw more participants towards our setup. Candy, informational flyers, coloring sheets for children, transit-related stickers, and bubbles gave potential participants a low-stakes means of entry to the engagement sphere whether or not they chose to participate in any of the activities at all.



# Logistics

## Step 2. Getting to the place

All materials were transported by van while the team members took public transportation  
 Estimated time (van): 30 min  
 Estimated time (team): 1 hour - 1:30 hrs  
 N° of people: 1 + 1 driver (both days).

## Step 4. Engagement

All the team in place participated throughout the engagement giving instructions, information and inviting people to participate.  
 Estimated time: 3hrs - 3:30 hrs (Both days)  
 N° of people: 13 (Day 1) / 8 (Day 2)

## Step 1. Packing and loading

Part of the team met at campus to pack all the material and load it into the van.  
 Estimated time: 1 hour  
 N° of people: 6 + 1 driver (Day 1) / 5 + 1 driver (Day 2)

## Step 3. Unloading and setting up

Some other members of the team were already in Jackson Heights to help unloading and start setting the space. The other part of the team joined in later to finish preparation and start with the engagement.  
 Estimated time: 45 min  
 N° of people: 6 (Day 1) / 3 (Day 2)

Repeat previous steps in reverse

# Logistical Considerations

Mobilizing this engagement process required unique logistical considerations.

## <sup>01</sup> Timing

The timing of our activity was intended to capture both the more laid-back atmosphere of a Sunday afternoon as well as the more fast-paced environment during the weekday afternoon rush hour. This allowed us to conduct engagements with different groups of people as well as the same people under different circumstances.

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## <sup>02</sup> Duration

The duration of our Sunday activity was intended to attract people during their daytime leisure activities while the Wednesday afternoon engagement was intended to last for the duration of rush hour.

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## <sup>03</sup> Climate

With rain in the forecast for our Sunday afternoon engagement, alternative engagement days were proposed. Weatherproofing measures, such as bags and tarps, were also prepared in the event of rain. The mild, sunny weather during our Sunday engagement ended up working to our benefit.

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## <sup>04</sup> Coinciding Happenings

Being such a vibrant and diverse community, Jackson heights also had concurrent events during our engagement activities, including a peace rally in support of the Dalai Lama that required us to shift our operations from Diversity Plaza to the smaller plaza underneath the 7 train.



# Reflection of Logistics

Part of the challenge for our engagement was getting to the place of the engagement itself. Given that we, and all the materials, were located at the Morningside campus, we had to find the best way to get to Jackson Heights along with all the necessary furniture and materials.

We had to work our personal networks and we were able to secure two vehicles to help us transport all the equipment. However, we did encounter some difficulties such as finding parking for the vehicle to stay in during the engagement. This also meant that the person driving could not help in setting up, therefore the importance of allowing enough time for this latter step during the logistics planning. Another difficulty resulting from this mode of transport was facing heavy traffic to get there and then to circulate around the area and find space for loading and unloading. This was particularly a bigger issue during our event on Wednesday, so this is another consideration to have when doing engagement during weekdays.

As for the part of the team commuting by public transit, we also encountered some difficulties with delays on trains or trains simply not working during our Sunday engagement. This situation resulted in a one-and-a-half-hour commute instead of the original one-hour trip planned. Therefore, this situation should also be considered when engaging during the weekend.

Finally, another thing to consider is the overlapping of other events. Indeed, the second day of our engagement, there was another event happening at Diversity Plaza which restricted the space where we could set up forcing us to set in a less suited space.



# Logistical Recommendations

Having a designated driver facilitates loading and unloading steps.

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Minding traffic and transit delays and allowing extra time for transportation is essential.

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Considering agenda and other events in the place to hold the engagement can avoid interaction conflicts.

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Working in partnership with other groups to source furniture can facilitate logistics.

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If documentation is needed, there should be a team specifically designated to this task.

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Engaging during week days versus the weekend allows to reach different public but it comes with different considerations regarding transportation and traffic.

# Maximising Inclusion

Reaching a broad array of community stakeholders was crucial for this project.

## <sup>01</sup> Diversity of Methods

Our methods comprised both verbal and written components. The written portions allowed for more passive engagement while still providing value data and our verbal methods more deeply engaged participants who wished to speak to us.

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## <sup>02</sup> Diversity of Options

All of our engagement materials were written in multiple languages that reflected the predominant language spoken in Jackson Heights aside from English. We also included a variety of candy options including gelatin-free candies for people with allergies.

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## <sup>03</sup> Transparency

When asked about our affiliation with the MTA, we made clear that we were Columbia students working on a community engagement framework for the IBX. Signage also made clear the participants were subject to being photographed for our project.

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## <sup>04</sup> Flexibility

Our studio members were flexible on the ground and were ready to accommodate participants and their varying willingness to engage, including those who wished to speak at greater length about the IBX and other related (or unrelated) subjects.



# Establishing Protocols

Creating protocols for unexpected events was also a component of our pre-engagement process

## <sup>01</sup> Navigating conflict

Before going out to Jackson heights, we settled upon disengagement and de-escalation tactics to ensure that any negative response to our engagement did not escalate further. Fortunately, aside from some critical comments about the MTA, no such events occurred.

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## <sup>02</sup> Setting expectations

Setting expectations about what would be asked of participants was crucial to creating a type of informed consent for those participating. Clearly communicating these expectations was ensured throughout the engagement process for each activity.

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## <sup>03</sup> Establishing boundaries

Boundaries are a necessary component in establishing trust with community members. During our engagement, we made sure that all participants were aware that they were being photographed and or filmed during their participation.

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## <sup>04</sup> Re-directing to other resources

Many participants were excited about the IBX and wished to elevate their feedback to the MTA. While the parameters of our project did not necessarily provide the outlet for us to do that, we did make sure to redirect and lingering concerns and feedback that the MTA could better handle.

# Developing Contingencies

Alternate plans for engagement were discussed and, in some cases, needed during the engagement process.

## <sup>01</sup> Inclement Weather

With weather forecasts calling for rain for our Sunday engagement, alternate days for engagement were determined and weatherproofing measures, including tarps and plastic covers were prepared in the event of significant precipitation.

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## <sup>02</sup> Unexpected Traffic

With parts of our group going to the site via public transit and some by automobile, traffic delays were also important to consider. While vehicular traffic was light, train delays during our Sunday engagement required temporary staffing changes at some of our activity stations.

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## <sup>03</sup> Unavailable Public Furniture

With some of our rental furniture unavailable during our Sunday engagement, we had to seek alternate furniture arrangements. These occurred in the form of borrowing excess tables from diversity plaza and consolidating some of our materials for the smaller space.

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## <sup>04</sup> Unavailable Space

Unanticipated community activities in and around Diversity Plaza required a change of venue for our Wednesday engagement. Our team moved to our planned secondary location, the small plaza underneath the 7 train and then into the subway station itself.



# Day 1













# Day 2



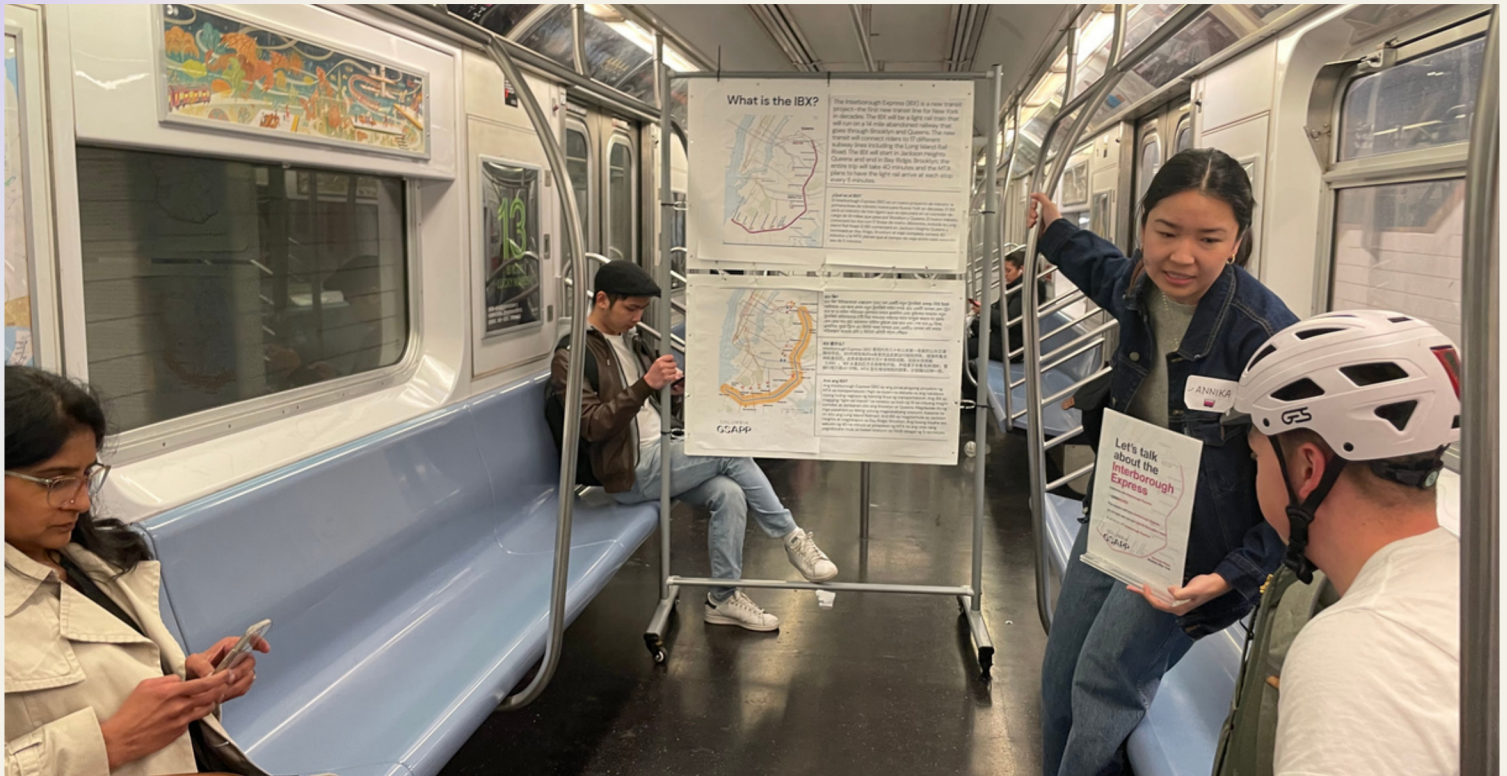














# Experiences On The Ground

Community engagement can be a powerful tool for connecting with the people of the community and understanding their needs, concerns, and perspectives.

## <sup>01</sup> Multi-language material

Based on the different experiences with engagement activities in Jackson Heights. People felt included when they were able to interact with the engagement, whether that be with the team or the material, in their native language.

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## <sup>02</sup> Engaging and Interactive material

People were interested in participating in this engagement; however, they felt more attracted to participate when giving offerings such as candies and having interactive material for kids. Parents felt more compelled to interact with us since their children were already cared for and having a good time.

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## <sup>03</sup> Engagement from the community to the community

It was an enriching experience to see that people started interacting with other community members after learning about the project by sharing thoughts or translating them and explaining the content in their language. At a point, the engagement seemed to take a life of its own.

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## <sup>04</sup> Listen to the community

They appreciate the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard. In order to have an effective engagement the team intended to create a safe space, build trust with the community by explaining our intentions and purposes for this activity, and being sensitive to people's needs and cultural contexts.



# Replicating At Scale

Our studio aims to provide our clients with a replicable engagement framework

## <sup>01</sup> Collaborating With Neighborhood Organizations

Our studio, after initial research, reached out to multiple community organizations in Jackson Heights. We sought out organizations like the Hort, which were able to assist us with some of the logistical problems for our engagement. Such groups already have experience dealing with such challenges and saved us time and effort in thinking them through.

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## <sup>02</sup> Approaching Different Neighborhoods

Approaching different neighborhoods before finding a community in which to conduct an engagement activity was indispensable for quality community engagement. Site visits and research can help find neighborhoods where engagement will likely be more fruitful.

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## <sup>03</sup> Setting Up on Different Days and Times

Setting up on different days and times was important for allowing us to reach different audiences within the same community. Different people are out on the street at different times for a variety of reasons, and these reasons can be factors that influence responses to projects like the IBX.

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## <sup>04</sup> Expecting Different Levels of Engagement

Not all participants are willing to participate in the same way. Our studio ensured that we provided both active and passive means of engagement, including on-the-spot interviews for those so inclined as well as drop boxes and free candy for those who wished a quieter form of engagement.

# Beyond Engagement

The lifespan of engagement activity is not limited to its planning and practice—how the results are processed and contextualized, strategies are evaluated, and the extent to which generalizability is measured are the questions that will determine how the engagement activity comes to inform planning, design, and policy decision-making processes at a local, national, and global scale.



# Quantitative Data Processing

Points collected from the 3D mapping section of our engagement were geocoded using ArcGIS Pro. The points, together with their qualitative inputs, were each assigned a pair of specific coordinates in order to map as precisely as possible. Associated descriptions and inputs from the points were then coded within the points for content accuracy.

## Limitations and Recommendations

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### **Point Accuracy**

The accuracy of the points is dependent on the researchers' interpretation of specific point locations. As points were inputted manually, researchers interpreted locations and assigned coordinates, according to a best estimate. Future iterations of this activity may look at ways in which point accuracy may be ensured at input such as putting inputs directly into a geocoded map or directly into a corresponding coordinate point.

### **Text-Coding**

When coding texts associated with points, entire sentences were added in text format within the GIS feature class. Text is readable as an input, but not as individual or coded segments. As it stands, the text associated with the points, as well as texts from other components in this activity, is best analyzed qualitatively. More fine tuning and additional future analysis may allow for mechanisms of Machine Learning to code text and effectively find patterns in unstructured data, or natural language processing, to extract more data driven insights from coded text-as-data.

# Qualitative Data Processing

Other components of the activity included interviews, sentiment sharing, comments on post-its, and other short-form question and answer formats geared towards understanding community sentiments and inputs regarding the Interborough Express. These were collected, scanned, and digitized to form a database of inputs. Two primary modes of analysis were employed in the qualitative processing of the data– Narrative analysis and thematic coding

## Limitations and Recommendations

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### **Researcher Bias**

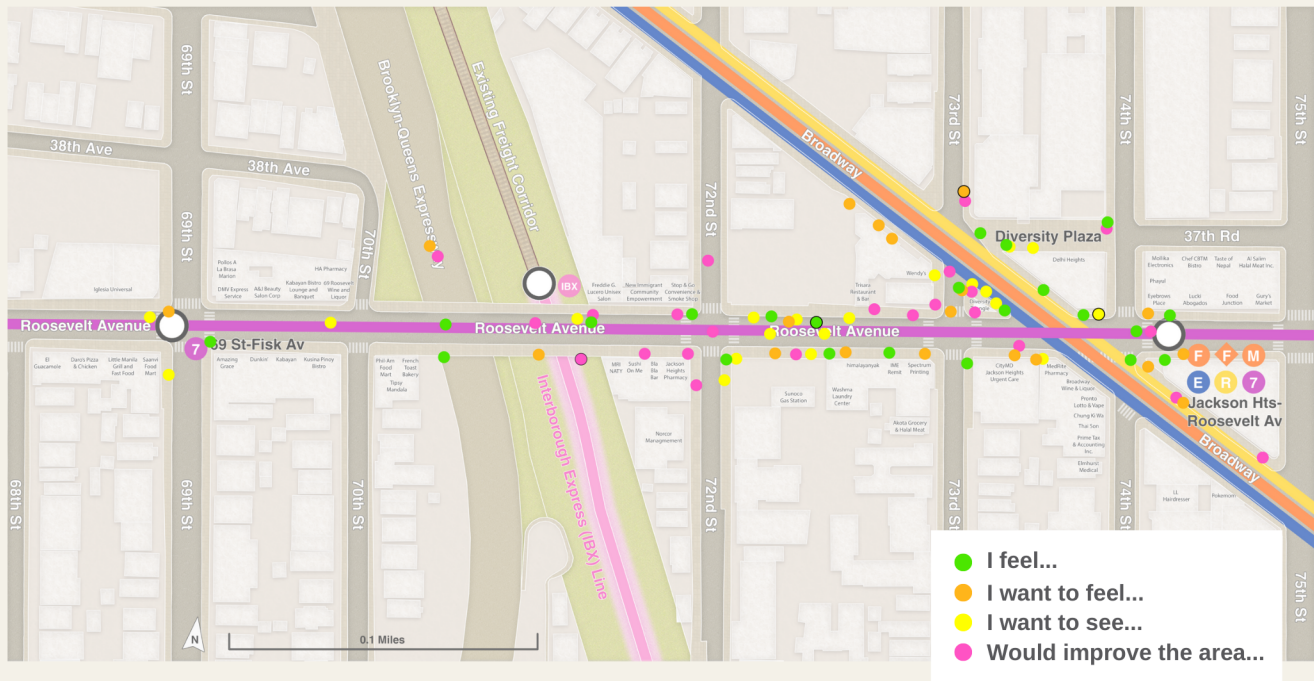
Thematic coding employs the use of categorization in that text or data forms are coded into categories depending on a common theme. This allows for the indexing of data for further qualitative analysis. Given our positionality as researchers and given the written-form of the text data gathered, researcher bias is inevitable in the interpretation and therefore categorization of text inputs. Further analysis may look into categorization-at-the-source in which respondents are able to theme or code their inputs as they deem appropriate.

### **Short-form Answer**

Narrative analysis is a form of qualitative analysis that is used to interpret text or visual data in order to create a story. Storied accounts are assumed to be good vehicles when explaining personal accounts– as in the case for sharing transit experiences with and without the Interborough express. However, given the short-form question and answer format we had provided, it is difficult to employ a narrative analysis given the lack of information. Interviews, video-correspondence, provide much more useful in the pursuit of narrative storytelling.



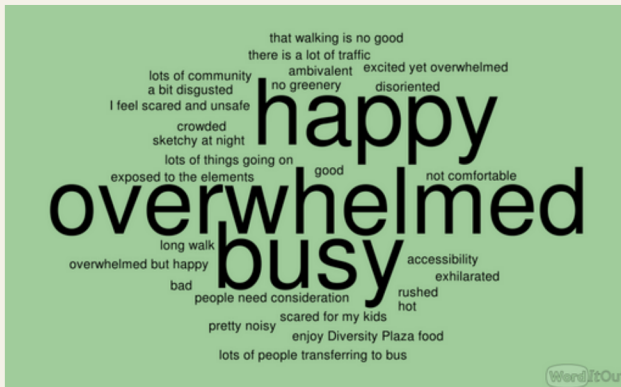
# Data and Findings



We were able to gather 83 sentiments and desires from both days of our engagement. Although a small sample, it serves to illustrate some of the concerns of the community and this qualitative information can guide and inform future urban design. The text cards were processed into word clouds to identify the most frequent feelings and desires. In the case of our engagement, we identified a call for safety, more green spaces and more connected transit in the area. Overall we can see that this is a space where people feel happy, yet overwhelmed with so many activities and people around.

# Data and Findings

*When I'm walking or passing through here, I feel...*



*When I'm walking or passing through here, I want to feel...*



*When I'm walking or passing through here, I want to see...*



*I think ... would improve this area*



Sentiments associated with point locations were compiled into word clouds to serve as the basis for our thematic analysis. Words or phrases that appeared more frequently appear bigger in the word cloud. Word clouds were grouped and color coded according to the question it corresponds to



# Preliminary Findings

Our preliminary findings showed that while Jackson Heights participants were excited about the IBX project, they still had reservations about the scope and timeline of the proposal.

## **Many people were not aware of the IBX proposal.**

Many participants in our engagement activities were not aware of the IBX project or had only heard very little about it. Our informational gallery walk was thus very popular for people educating themselves on the IBX.

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## **Most people were eager to learn more about the IBX.**

Participants were excited about the IBX, with many individuals calling family members, excitedly discussing it with their partners or even showing relatives our gallery walk on FaceTime.

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## **Many expressed pessimism about the timeline of the project.**

Despite this excitement, many individuals were pessimistic about the ability of the MTA to construct this project on a reasonable time scale, with the current 10-15 year estimate of completion discouraging many.

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## **Some expressed pessimism about the scope of the project.**

Some participants were doubtful that such a large-scale system expansion could be achieved, with some individuals skeptical about the MTA's ability to build such a significant transit line.

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## **Some felt the the IBX was not a priority.**

Some respondents felt that constructing a new transit line was not as important as maintaining a state of good repair on existing MTA facilities. Some pointed to deficiencies on the current Queens Blvd line as an example.

# Limitations to Findings

As with any research design, our findings are limited by certain factors both within and without our control.

## Ecological Validity

Create different types of videos, such as product demos, behind-the-scenes footage, and customer testimonials.

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## Generalizability

While Jackson Heights is a unique case study for the IBX, local conditions are not replicated elsewhere, making some of our findings site-specific.

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## Interpretability

While our findings are specific to the IBX, other general community sentiments can be interpreted from our work, including issues of crime, cleanliness and public realm maintenance.

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## Language Differences

While our team is diverse and multilingual, we were not able to engage with every potential participant due to language barriers, therefore, those narratives were left out of our project.

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## Vulnerability to Bias

Any study is vulnerable to the biases of those conducting them, and the decisions made when setting up and designing the project could have influenced our findings.



# Implication of Findings

Through this community engagement process, the implications of findings highlight the importance of identifying and addressing the thoughts and concerns of the community in the IBX's design process that could be helpful to consider and redesign for better outcomes.

## **Enhancing Community's participation**

By doing this activity, the MTA and DCP can demonstrate their commitment to the well-being and interest in understanding the concerns and opinions of the community. This will help build trust and credibility with the communities with the MTA and ensure the active participation of the communities in the design and development process of this project.

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## **Address Community's concerns**

From the data gathered, people have expressed their excitement for this project; however, there are concerns about the possibility of the project's impact on land value. Will this project generate more traffic congestion than already exists in the area? It is crucial to identify these issues so the MTA can tackle them in the project's design process.

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## **Data issues**

One-on-one opened ended interviews can reveal gaps in data quality or availability, which can inhibit the MTA's ability to make informed decisions or assess the impact of their initiatives.

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## **Demonstration of interest**

This activity has shown our studio the willingness and interest of the community to participate in the development of the project and their interest in being informed about the following steps.

# Addressing Limitations

Taking the time not only to acknowledge our limitations, but address how they could be mitigated moving forward, is essential for creating a well-balanced and reflective engagement toolkit.

## Ecological Validity

Injecting more nuance and cautioning readers that data findings represent a small subset of the community is key to properly contextualizing findings. Moving forward, collecting demographic information could help us judge how our respondents relate to the community at-large.

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## Generalization

As mentioned previously, generalization can be dangerous when attempting to ascribe sentiments to a whole community. Maintaining nuance as well as questioning the range of viewpoints in our findings can be useful to identify gaps.

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## Interpretability

While many participants found our visuals and associated tools easy and clear to understand, there were several that struggled to grasp what we were doing/asking. Clearer visuals with more a purposeful spatial layout could be more intuitive.

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## Language Differences

Diversity Plaza is true to its name and contains a multitude of people from all nations on Earth. We preempted language concerns in our visuals, however, having more on-hand interpreters could not only improve communication but build trust.

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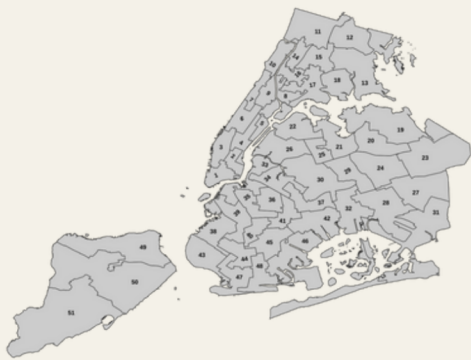
## Vulnerable to Bias

As GSAPP students, we of course have our own passionate opinions on the IBX and other planning projects. Keeping that bias in check, especially when describing the project to participants, could help elicit more genuine responses from participants.



# Potential Partnerships

## Community Boards



The Interborough Express route, which extends through multiple neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens, spans multiple community boards which provide an advisory role in municipal matters like land use, zoning, public services, and welfare. These volunteer boards serve a vital function as the conduit between residents and the New York City government.

The project will interface with Brooklyn Community Board 4, Brooklyn Community Board 7, Brooklyn Community Board 12, Brooklyn Community Board 16, Brooklyn Community Board 17, Queens Community Board 2, and Queens Community Board 5. Each of these municipal bodies will have an important role to play in responding to the needs of residents following the creation of this new transit route.

## IMPACCT Brooklyn



IMPACCT Brooklyn was founded in 1964 by Rev. Richard Johnson, Amos Taylor and Furman Walls as the Pratt Area Community Council to provide support to the Clinton Hill and Bedford-Stuyvesant areas. Their focus is to advocate for affordable housing, tenants' rights, and economic renewal.

The organization will play an important role in ensuring housing along the project route remains accessible and affordable for current community members. As a member of the NYS Neighborhood Preservation Program, IMPACCT Brooklyn plays a front-line role in restoring current housing stock to meet the needs of 21st century tenants. The organization also partners with both private and nonprofit developers to sponsor the building of new residential buildings that meet affordability criteria.

# Potential Partnerships

## Queens Economic Development Corporation



The Queens Economic Development Corporation seeks to foster the creation and retention of jobs through small business assistance, shepherding entrepreneurship, and the promotion of low-to-moderate income, women, minority, and immigrant business ventures.

In partnership with the New York City Economic Development Corporation, the Queens EDC will work to support the ongoing efforts of the Queens Chambers of Commerce, 13 Business improvement Districts, nonprofit organizations, and workforce development organizations in the area. Some of their ongoing initiatives include Queens Tech + Innovation Challenge and the Queens Small Business Grant Program which fund the maintenance and advancement of local enterprises.

## Riders Alliance



Riders Alliance is a grassroots advocacy group working towards "providing reliable, affordable, world-class public transit in order to build a more just and sustainable New York." Since its formation in 2012, the coalition has become one of the most powerful political constituencies in the city— one composed of transit riders and activists alike.

The organization is a primary force when looking at riders' and commuters' rights surrounding the implementation of a new transit project. Questions and concerns about transit access, fare increases, free transfers, rider accessibility are all aspects that are central to the mission and work of Rider's Alliance.



# Potential Partnerships

## Right to the City



Right to the City is an alliance founded in 2007 to create social change for common ownership of land, mitigating the effects of climate change, furthering the interests of the rights of working-class individuals, indigenous justice, freedom from government harassment, and increased access to transportation services throughout New York City.

Working to advance causes related to the welfare and betterment of working-class Black, Indigenous, transgender, LGBTQI+ and people of color communities, Right to the City can play an integral role in ensuring equitable outcomes following the creation of the Interborough Express project.

## Regional Plan Association



Founded in 1922, the Regional Plan Association, or RPA, is a leading civic organization which conducts research on the environment, land use, and good governance in order to promote ideas to improve economic health, environmental resiliency, and quality of life within the New York metropolitan area. Through their comprehensive regional plans published in 1929, 1968, 1996, and 2017 the Regional Plan Association seeks to guide future development of the infrastructure and built environment.

Following the most recent Fourth Regional Plan which was published in 2017, the Regional Plan Association will have a voice in ensuring equity and sustainability for neighborhoods in light of the current environmental, political, and economic climate of the present day.

# Potential Partnerships

## QueensLink



QueensLink is a 501c(3) not-for profit organization which seeks to reactivate 3.5 miles of the former Rockaway Beach Line to expand rail service for commuters from Southeast Queens. Through the expansion of this rail line, QueensLink aims to condense the travel times for neighborhoods like Ozone Park and the Rockaway peninsula by roughly 25 minutes.

As a grassroots neighborhood group with similar aims to redeploy the reuse of existing infrastructure, QueensLink can serve as a complement to the Interborough Express project.

## Transportation Alternatives



Transportation Alternatives is a major New York City-based nonprofit organization which has led the movement for safe, equitable streets in New York City through public policy, street design, enforcement, and resource allocation to transform streets to respond to the needs of communities.

Through their existing organizing efforts and coalition of over 30,000 neighborhood activists, Transportation Alternatives can be a major partner in advocating for the needs of communities around the Interborough Express as it transforms and shapes the built environment of Brooklyn and Queens. As a regrantee of the U.S. Federal Highway Administration's Surface Transportation Block Grant, Transportation Alternatives will be able to deploy philanthropic capital to assist with community improvements like pedestrian and bicycle facilities.



# Future Opportunities

Our engagement thought process doesn't stop here, we have identified numerous avenues of improvement for future endeavors.

## 01 **Build Partnerships and Solidarities**

As we saw in our literature review, building partnerships with trusted community organizations can facilitate more effective engagement and help to build greater levels of trust between the planners and the community. Cooperating with planning-adjacent organizations such as QueensLink and/or community cornerstones such as the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services, could be impactful in achieving our aims.

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## 02 **Evaluate Existing Engagement Protocol**

In order to better situate our methodology and engagement approach within the existing environment, a more detailed review of engagement protocols for the public sector, in New York and around the world, could be useful in identifying any further gaps.

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## 03 **Use Both Analog and Digital Engagement Tools**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has shown the world the power of digital and virtual tools, and planners have been both reckoning with and excitedly exploring the possibilities of virtual engagement methods and online avenues of input that can be engaged with at any time. Considering the large role technology is playing in our lives, especially for the younger generations, exploring digital and non-temporal tools for future engagement could lead to even more voices being heard.

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## 04 **Recognize Engagement as a Means for Trust Building**

Our process was centered around producing a viable methodology to best engage the community. However, it is important to recognize that the community is a constant and living space, not just a location to wander into when planners need community input. Using engagement as a process of building trust and deepening connection, first, and collecting data second, could be explored more extensively in the future. This could be revolutionary for building long-lasting trust and transparency and maintaining relationships.

# Acknowledgements

It is important to recognize that this studio and its outcomes would not have been possible without the contributions and technical assistance of many of our friends and family, inclusive of those as follows—

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- Georgia Faulkner/The Horticultural Society
- NYC Department of Transportation
- Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Cronson

## Translations

- Cesar Boc
- Kavyaa Rizal
- Sharon Mathews
- Dhvani Sanjay Laddha
- Gertie Ma
- The Hui Family
- Emaz Uddin
- Debbie Ullman
- Bengali Language Resource Center at Columbia University



# Appendix

## Appendix I. Post-It Responses

	Response
1	Me toma 1h30 ilegar a mi trabajo, me guotaria tardar menos tiempo - Luis
2	Normally I take the F or E train to Grand Central 7 days a week - Cesar
3	MTA too expensive. How to fix the fair fares program. Welcome NYers and their ideas. Free Transport.
4	Absolutely necessary!
5	Creo que va a ser positivo porque no tengo que nocer transbordo - Lurdes
6	There should be better management. Too crowded.
7	Wow could you schedule maintenance so that people can still get home?
8	People will be affected. I'm worried about the community.
9	Necessary interborough train line long overdue
10	I took the E train here and it was delayed for 30 mins! - Yujin
11	My daily commute is from JH to upper east 110th but the seven is always packed, to have a new line can ease the rush house - Aman
12	There is going to be a lot of traffic - Rabindra
13	I dont think this project will benefit me

	Response
14	convenient
15	Seria beneficioso porque nos ahorraria tiempo y distancia - Freddy
16	En el tren R
17	I travel in train from Queens to Mapleton
18	F express
19	I took the E
20	Viajo en bus por 50 minutos desde Queens hasta Long Island - Teresa
21	I travel in Bus to my job, but sometimes I take the F train to 57th st in Manhattan - Maria
22	Sounds like a great idea for commuters of NYC
23	I would want a seamless scheduling between transportation services - Teresa
24	Retradod en los buses, son los obstáculos durante mi desplazamiento. ¡Muchas veces no ilegan! Metoma mucho tiempo ilegar a mi trabajo - Teresa
25	If it helps people with their time, I like this proposal whatever makes people's lives easier - Aman
26	We need for 179 - Cross Island. I support seriously
27	It will make getting to BK much easier
28	No good idea because people won't use it! There is not enough people
29	This project is good and convenient - Bobby



	Response
30	The F train - it was so convenient. But why is only Manhattan connected? :(
31	The E from Court Square
32	I took the 7
33	Please try to work on linking northern BLVD 32 Av, 31 Av, 25th Av
34	It is interesting that it won't go underground and I like that it will be faster
35	sometimes there are delay
36	took R train to QB then take F train
37	help cut travel time to BK
38	Jackson Heights to Queens Plaza - Rabbie
39	The 7 is ull maybe by having other option we can have more space if going to Manhattan
40	Already exist bridges that are being underutilized
41	It will save me time and it will make my commute easier - Yeshe
42	It will be quicker to get to my sister's in BK - Rabindra
43	My honest opinion we need more trains further into deep Queens. - Rabindra
44	It will affect it tremendously. Being able to get to BRK w/o going to Manhattan! WOW
45	It get to Jackson Heights via the R train from R Steinway. I'll be going home w/ the 7 train

	Response
46	Es muy bueno
47	I like these
48	She takes the F in Bay
49	Save me so much time, stress, and money!
50	Necessary!
51	I don't take the train to BK but my friends do and they have to take many buses and trains, it takes too long.
52	Serie magnifico, porque hace Falta mejorar el transporte público en Queens - Luis R
53	I am happy because I would like to see my area develop and it will be beneficial for JH residents - Sharif
54	I might consider moving to brooklyn if this subway was there
55	Bad news for middle class people, because the rent would go up
56	Will make property value more & stabilize the Real Estate
57	I'm from JH! Will use to visit friends + family in Sunset Park
58	It took me 1 Hr to get out of my neighborhood by car. The IBX would let me get to JH Quick!
59	It takes me 45 minutes and you tell me that the same route 25 minutes
60	Puede afectar a los comerciantes, la ciudad ya no es como antes - Luis Rivera
61	The IBX will help me see my loved ones in Brooklyn more! Wish it would be built FASTER!



	Response
62	It takes about 2 Hrs to go to Brooklyn - Yeshi
63	The project is good but the problem is how they are going to make it work - Lurde F
64	Why not Queens to Brooklyn Subway - Rabbie
65	I travel by bus from Jackson Heights to Long Island everyday - Teresa
66	It will make neighborhood beautiful more safer & accessible
67	Super important in allowing those w/o cars access to multiple boroughs w/o going thru Manhattan
68	I am concern about the security in the subway station - Ram
69	It will make it a lot easier to visit friends in Bay Ridge (and eat the great food there)
70	They should focus on fixing what already exists - Mark
71	Will this actually happen?
72	Supportive of IBX
73	Every development has a bad and good side - Rabbie
74	It will help the train during rush house, it will take people going to Brooklyn directly - Tenzin
75	It should already be there. NYC is too late in this.
76	I love the subway!
77	Good idea to connect faster with Brooklyn - Yeshi

	Response
78	Muy favorable nos ayuda ria micho
79	I will be able to commute to brooklyn over the weekend w/o worrying about parking
80	I take the train and bus to go to work, the L, R, or H trains allow me to get to Queens Hall - Olga
81	I have a concern, is this going to generate traffic on the st?
82	I travel to Manhattan by subway but elsewhere by car, to get to other places is sometimes difficult - Sharif

## Appendix II. Model Prompt Responses

	When I'm walking or passing through here, I feel...
1	Rushed
2	Ambivalent. I don't have a car
3	More lighting and safer commuter routes
4	Flowers and gardens
5	Long walk
6	At night, I feel scaed, unsafe even in the daytime too
7	Excited yet overwhelmed
8	Excillerrated, busy, lots of community



	When I'm walking or passing through here, I feel...
9	Not comfortable, scared for my kids
10	A little overwhelmed. Roosevelt Avenue near the station can be pretty noisy or sketchy at night
11	I feel good, happy, excited
12	Overwhelmed
13	Exposed to the elements
14	Enjoy Diversity Plaza, food
15	Very busy especially in the morning, people need consideration
16	I feel a but overwhelmed but happy
17	Because I need
18	Bad because there is a lot of traffic
19	Accessibility
20	Crowded, lots of people transferring to bus
21	A bit disgusted
22	Disoriented! Lots of things going on

	When I'm walking or passing through here, I want to feel...
1	hot, no greenery
2	Ambivalent. I don't have a car
3	A respite in the middle of my commute, a break from crumbling or poorly used infrastructure
4	Safe, sound, happy, comfortable
5	Safe
6	Chaos, Energy
7	Safe, Seen
8	Safer
9	Safe
10	I feel excited by seeing diversity of people walking and smiling, I feel happy
11	Like I know where I'm going
12	Clear announcements
13	Bueno
14	I want to feel less congested
15	Walking no good
16	Safe



	When I'm walking or passing through here, I want to feel...
17	I want to feel just as safe and satisfied like when I transfer in Grand Central/Times Square. Clean environment, easy to follow, and of course, like it's worth my time.
18	Comfortable

	When I'm walking or passing through here, I want to see...
1	Better lighting, more pedestrian space, less parking, more delivery zones
2	I want to see green space
3	Green spaces that are pedestrian friendly (a space similar to Baruch's closed off campus)
4	Green areas
5	Less traffic, clean, no homeless people
6	Maintained diversity and energy
7	Lots of businesses, shops, locals
8	Trees
9	Community and people
10	I want to see more place for parking and have people walk happily
11	Greenery, a park?
12	Clear signage directing riders to the IBX station

	When I'm walking or passing through here, I want to see...
13	Less people, 7 train
14	Fewer ugly businesses
15	Moving walkway
16	Seating spaces, so much amazing food but nowhere to enjoy this amazing community
17	Late night food
18	Directions
19	More police for safety
20	Cleaner road

	I think ... would improve this area.
1	Expanded car-free public space for better pedestrian flow
2	A grocery store or market
3	More walkable green spaces would improve this area
4	Cleaning, environment friendly
5	Yes 100%
6	Street crossings



	I think ... would improve this area.
7	More connected transit
8	Less people drinking, less fights and garbage, smoking stores
9	More space for Diversity Plaza + activities would be great but sometimes it could be crowded
10	I would like to connect both stops so that people can easily transfer one to another
11	I really appreciate this idea. Hope MTA gives us better ideas. Yes I hope this one goes to more development
12	I think we could make places for people to walk and stores on the block also about parking
13	Free transfers, bus stations, accessibility shuttle
14	I like it! Good idea
15	Better intersection design especially for disabled travelers
16	Removing the BQE
17	Underground moving walkway but ugh need to dig, Great idea, better than a bike trail
18	Yes, but I feel that often times with nice new initiatives, it's hostile architecture put in place like benches that are metal and uncomfortable. This rail should truly try to uplift and beautify the community it's in
19	I want to see the new and beautiful IBX line
20	Shuttle service
21	Having a dedicated transfer walkway

	I think ... would improve this area.
1	Put more garbage containers and keep the area clean
2	I support the new line

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