

# STATEMENT OF NEEDS

IT'S OUR MONEY!



**NYC** Civic  
Engagement  
Commission

 **Coro** NEW YORK  
LEADERSHIP  
CENTER

## Background

The Civic Engagement Commission (CEC) is running a participatory budgeting process designed by youth, for youth, in partnership with the Coro New York Leadership Center PB Youth Fellowship Program. The goal of the project is to engage and empower young people to decide how to spend \$100,000 of expense funding on projects that meet their needs, address their interests, and strengthen youth engagement across the city. Youth provider organizations will be invited to submit proposals that directly address the ideas and needs youth identify in the first stage of the project. Youth votes will determine the projects awarded. In phase one, youth ages 9-24 were invited to come to our online events and submit their ideas.

This report is a summary of all of the methods that we have used to discover our findings from the first stage of this process and a walkthrough of what we heard from other young people.

# Table of contents

<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of contents</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Findings - What Young People Say They Need</b>	<b>4</b>
Issue #1: Our Mental Health Matters	4
Issue #2: We don't feel prepared for our future	5
Issue #3: Stop ignoring us	6
<b>Summary of Engagement Methods</b>	<b>8</b>
Gathering Information from Youth	8
How Virtual Facilitators crafted the engagement	8
Channels for Engagement	8
Polis	8
Agenda for standard virtual engagement	8
Other methods of engagement	9
SMS / Text	9
Self Guided Resource	10
Gathering information from Youth Workers	11
Designing the interview	11
Standard Agenda for youth worker interview	11
<b>Information/statistics</b>	<b>11</b>
Who participated?	11
<b>Thank you</b>	<b>14</b>
Coro New York Leadership Center	14
Civic Engagement Commission	15

# Findings - What Young People Say They Need

## Issue #1: Our Mental Health Matters

A common problem that was constantly brought up was issues with mental health and stress that youth are going through during this time. Out of the 227 statements submitted, 78 had to do with stress and mental health issues, and more than 100 are issues that can lead to mental health or stress issues.

Some contributors to poor mental health and stress that we saw were virtual learning, financial issues, the lack of motivation, and the fact that youth are constantly at home.

Highlights from statements made by youth related to mental health:

Statement	% agreed	% disagreed	% passed/ unsure
“Currently during COVID, education is difficult, mental health is at an all time low, and loneliness is kicking in for many people.”	94%	1%	4%
“Declining mental health is a huge problem for today's youth which needs to be prioritized by the DOE and other city institutions.”	89%	2%	7%
“I think young people face financial stress: many parents have lost their jobs and some youth need to contribute financially to the household”	87%	1%	11%
“I think young people are stressed but do not know what is stressing them out.”	68%	16%	14%

Some solutions that young people suggested include:

- “An event that begins with a mental health issue ie: radical self love, non violent communication, toxic behaviors in parenting, codependency, etc. We facilitate a space that holds space for US & OUR FEELINGS We acknowledge that all of our feelings are okay, we tackle guilt, shame and fear by giving them names and raising our awareness. We are able to submit questions anonymously (piece of paper/ online submission) or by raising a hand to have an honest discussion about said topic. The second half of the event is focused on artful expression. We have acknowledged these difficult feelings, how will we express them? The second half can be centered on group or individual workshops on creating poetry, music or any multimedia art focused on mere expression, turning our feelings into natural expressions” - Melika  
(<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/15>)

- “A place where people can have group therapy and share their experiences or have a one on one with someone to talk to.” - Anonymous  
(<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/56>)
- “More funding in order to support youth who need to get therapy or counseling. Therapy is expensive and there's a long process of receiving help or even appealing for therapy, but why take so much time for an issue that is affecting me at this moment? Also, funding should be more than enough to get youth the best help they can get. As in, there should be flexibility that allows youth to change their therapists if they don't feel safe and comfortable with them. Not to mention, they should be allowed to say what type of therapist that they want to have, as well as being protective of our LGBTQ+ youth. There should also be therapists from all different backgrounds that caters to the youth that needs help.” - Anonymous  
(<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/30>)
- “Having therapy for poc or minority groups where mental health is a taboo topic.” -Redat  
(<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/63>)

## Issue #2: We don't feel prepared for our future

One place where young people have struggled is being prepared for the future. Out of 227 ideas submitted by youth, 32 of them were related to preparation for the future. The lack of guidance from counselors and workers in school has proven to be detrimental.

In addition, working opportunities for youth have diminished significantly making it hard to gain work experience or find a career people enjoy. Many have also felt that there hasn't been enough support in figuring out the college application process, which can be very difficult to navigate.

Some things youth have said are:

Statement	% agreed	% disagreed	% passed/unsure
“I think one very big issue that young people face today is deciding on what they want to do in the future.”	86%	3%	9%
“Many young people are hurting financially by loss of jobs in their family, struggling to handle a job in COVID, and college debt- in remote!”	94%	2%	2%
“Scared of future responsibilities”	77%	8%	13%

“thinking about college + their future is stressful, especially for seniors”	88%	1%	10%
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Some solutions given by youth have been:

- “Creating a space where young adults and teens can figure out what they wanna do in life if they’re lost and don’t know what they wanna do long term. Can include GED programs and permit programs” - Tach  
<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/23>)
- “Ask or answer the questions on what the youth needs to find what they need or look for in their way of life. Whats their passion, likes and dislikes , what they look for in themselves , what they want to improve in their life or what they can contribute in the world.Then let them answering the questions for themselves or even ask them for them.After that help them choose the following options a college, trade, or a gap year(beneficial on exploring what a person looks or prepare them much better in life after it).After that time will tell the talking on helping them what to choose in life on either which option they choose.No question is correct or wrong.Its just on how they feel or what they know what's right in their life” - Anonymous  
<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/45>)
- “Having a program that guides students through the college application process, standardized tests, and job opportunities.” - Redat  
<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/64>)

### Issue #3: Stop ignoring us

A third theme that we saw from other young people is a general frustration with the issues going on around them and the fact that young people are always left out of the conversation. There is a feeling that adults are making a lot of bad decisions and us young people are bearing the burden of those decisions now and will continue to do so far into the future.

Young people are frustrated at all of the injustices that have come to the forefront, and this frustration is compounded by the fact they they’ve been talking about this for a while and still are marginalized and left out of the conversation.

About 31/227 are about this topic; here are a few examples:

Statement	% agreed	% disgareed	% passed/ unsure
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“Young people often feel voiceless when they’re talking because we are compared so much to adults and no one ever wants to listen to us.”	91%	5%	2%
“having to deal with environmental burdens that have been placed on them by prior generations and gov decisions”	88%	0%	11%
“I think young people are struggling with the fact that this year sucks and there’s so many injustices that have come to light this year.”	87%	2%	10%
“Youth voices are seen as ‘amazing and game-changing’ but at the same time are ignored. It's frustrating”	87%	8%	4%
“We're supposed to be simultaneously educated on issues and corruption and yet be complacent”	84%	3%	12%

Some ideas from youth that could address this are:

- “To host/create a program that educates and promotes academic discussion around politics, the government (city, state, and local), the constitution, rules + regulations under the law, and our human rights.”  
<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/33>
- “Inviting K-12th graders to learn more about the natural environment and how to engage in sustainability in an urban setting.”  
<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/61>
- “To help other black citizens use their voice even when they are scared or else we are not going to have our voices heard enough or at all”  
<https://www.participate.nyc.gov/processes/itsourmoney/f/1/proposals/14>

# Summary of Engagement Methods

## Gathering Information from Youth

### How Virtual Facilitators crafted the engagement

#### Channels for Engagement

We decided to create three different methods for youth engagement: Zoom sessions, Text-based engagement, and self-directed engagements. Each option allows us to expand accessibility and make sure people can participate in this process no matter what their relationship with technology is.

For Zoom sessions, different presentations were made based on the number of participants. If there were a lot of participants, we would use the zoom chat often and for small groups we just had conversations out loud.

#### Polis

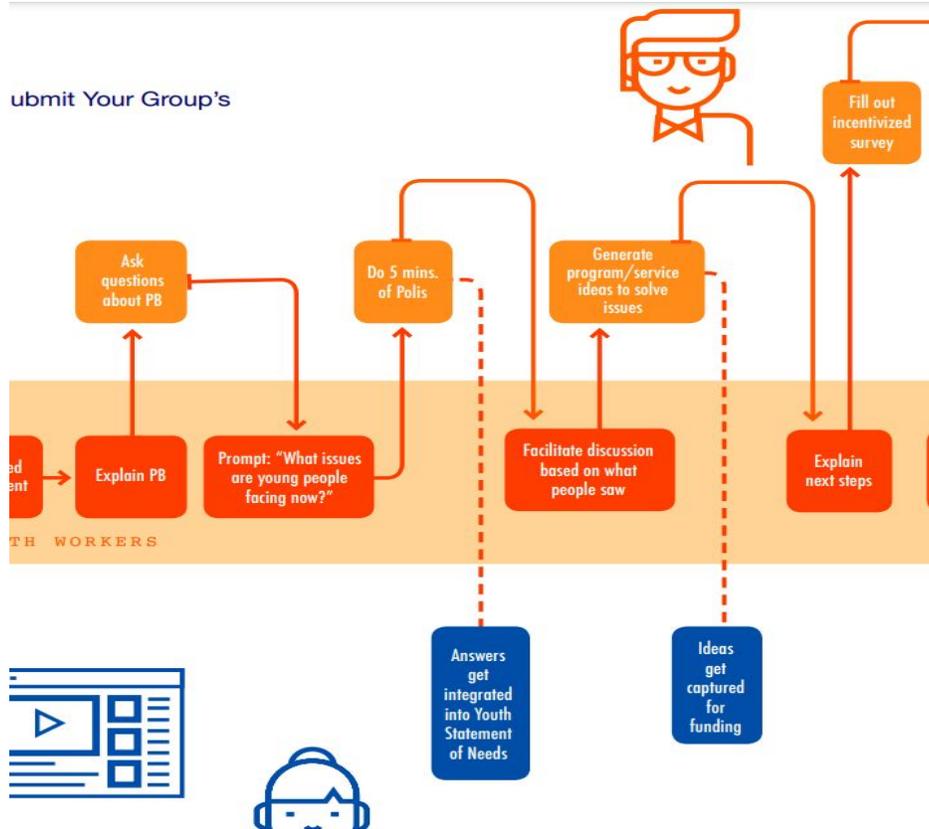
Pol.is is a real-time survey system that helps identify the different ways a large group of people think about a divisive or complicated topic. It allows us, the virtual facilitators, to gather people's thoughts and collect the needs of youth *from* youth.

### Agenda for standard virtual engagement

We start with a spectrum exercise where we read a statement that is a yes or no question and get people to respond. Steadily the questions get more difficult and are related to PB or politics.

Then, we would move to Polis, the tool we used to gather data for the needs assessment. Participants could answer questions and begin to evaluate different statements. We would then have an open discussion on the issues and do a small brainstorming session of potential solutions.

At the end of the meeting, exit surveys were used to help to get feedback on what should continue and what should stop doing in terms of facilitation. Additionally we gathered personal information in order to remain in touch with participants. This allowed for continued engagement as well as expanding our audience.



A flowchart of a typical session

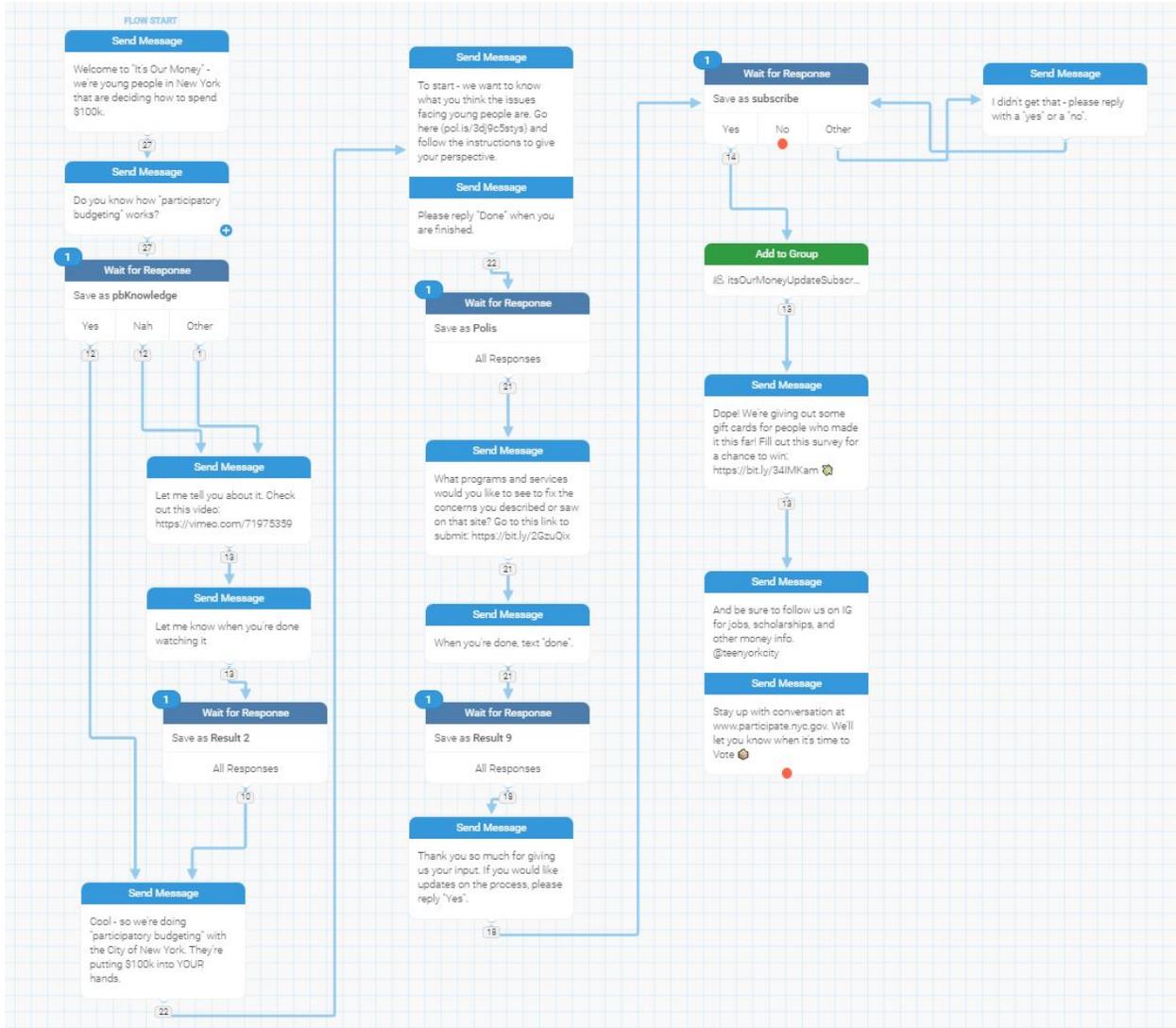
## Other methods of engagement

### SMS / Text

Additionally, in order to provide more ways for young people to participate in the needs assessment, Coro Youth Fellows designed a texting bot that walked someone through the same prompts that they would encounter in a virtual Zoom session with our Coro Youth Fellows.

Being able to reach youth on their phones made it easy to inform and gather information from youth. In order to access the texting bot, young people were instructed to text a keyword to a phone number, which would then start the conversation.

Text participants are also able to sign up for updates with information on how to vote, when to vote, how to access our resources like our digital platform, [participate.nyc.gov](https://participate.nyc.gov).



Our texting platform workflow

### Self Guided Resource

Another way we expanded our reach was through a self guided resource. This guide is for youth service providers, teachers, or anyone who would like to run their own needs discussion with a group of young people. This guide was developed by Coro New York Leadership Center’s PB Youth Fellowship team and shares the script that our Virtual Facilitator’s designed to run a needs gathering and idea collection session with youth across New York City.

The Civic Engagement Commission added design on top of our content and [published it to our digital platform](#).

# Gathering information from Youth Workers

## Designing the interview

Researchers created a template that assessed different areas that young people may be struggling with including: impacts of covid, mental health, employment, youth programming and activities, housing, and food insecurity. Youth workers came from a variety of different youth organizations and each offered a different area they were strong in. By consulting with many youth workers it allowed us to highlight the more important needs of youth.

## Standard Agenda for youth worker interview

Interviews would start with introductions followed by the worker giving an explanation of the role they serve in their organization. They also would talk about what their organization does to help youth. Next, there would be a series of questions that researchers would ask and take notes on the responses. After all questions were answered the interview would end and researchers would evaluate the answers in order to determine the needs that we deemed most important.

# Information/statistics

## Who participated?

A total of 384 youth participated in the first phase of this process. Of those, 247 youth, or 75%, participated in a demographic survey.

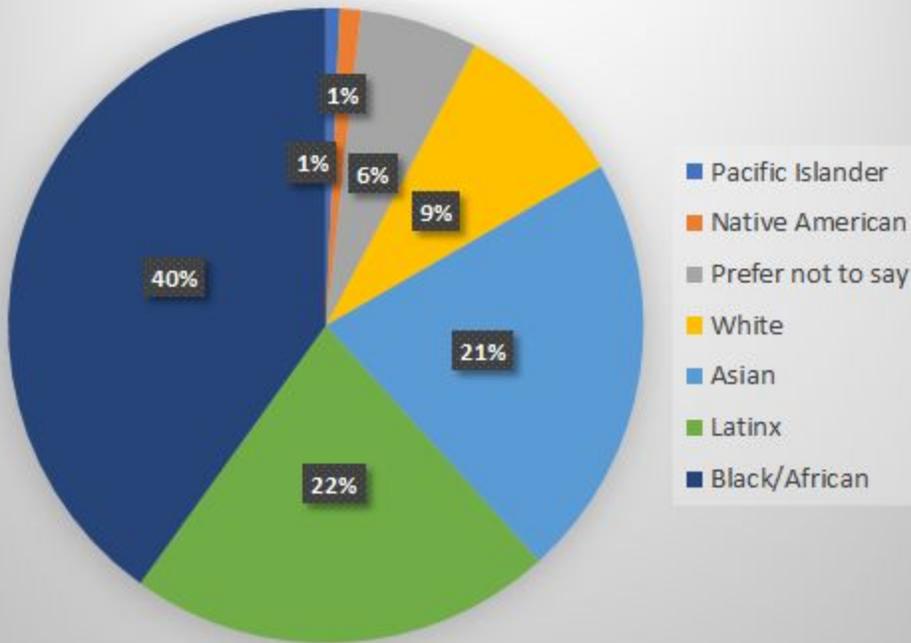
Out of the total of 247 survey respondents:

- 91% are nonwhite
- 22% were born outside of the U.S.
- 69% are female, 23% male, 5% non-binary, and 3% chose not to identify
- 4% identified as transgender
- 51% live in the 25 priority communities (projects funded as a result of this process must serve at least one of these 25 communities)<sup>1</sup>

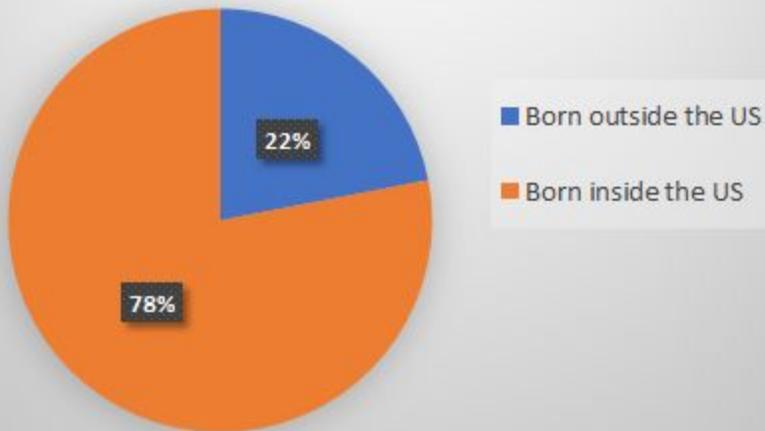
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<sup>1</sup> Note: This list of eligible neighborhoods was compiled to ensure “It’s Our Money” serves the needs of young people in neighborhoods that were the most impacted by Covid-19 and its resulting social, economic, and public health impacts. The data used to inform this list includes the [Citizens Committee for Children \(CCC\) Risk Child & Family Well-being Community District Risk Ranking](#) and NYC’s [Department of Health Covid-19 data](#) (case rates). CCC’s data examines 18 different indicators across 6 domains of child and family well-being including economic security, housing, health, education, family, and community. The report uses indicators such as child poverty rates, parental employment instability, the rate of families with children in homeless shelters, high-school graduation rates, and youth unemployment. We hope this eligibility requirement leads to more equitable outcomes.

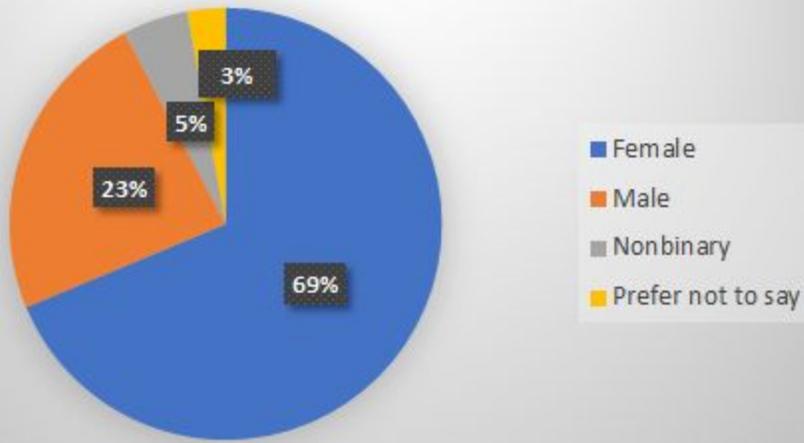
### Participants by Race and Ethnicity



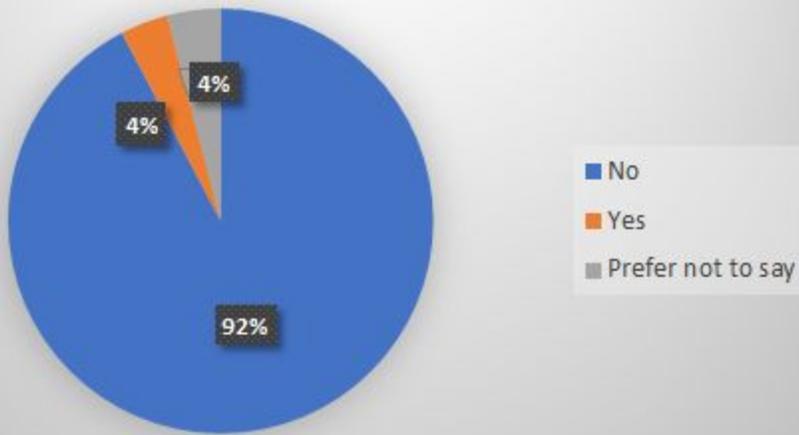
### Participants Born Outside the US

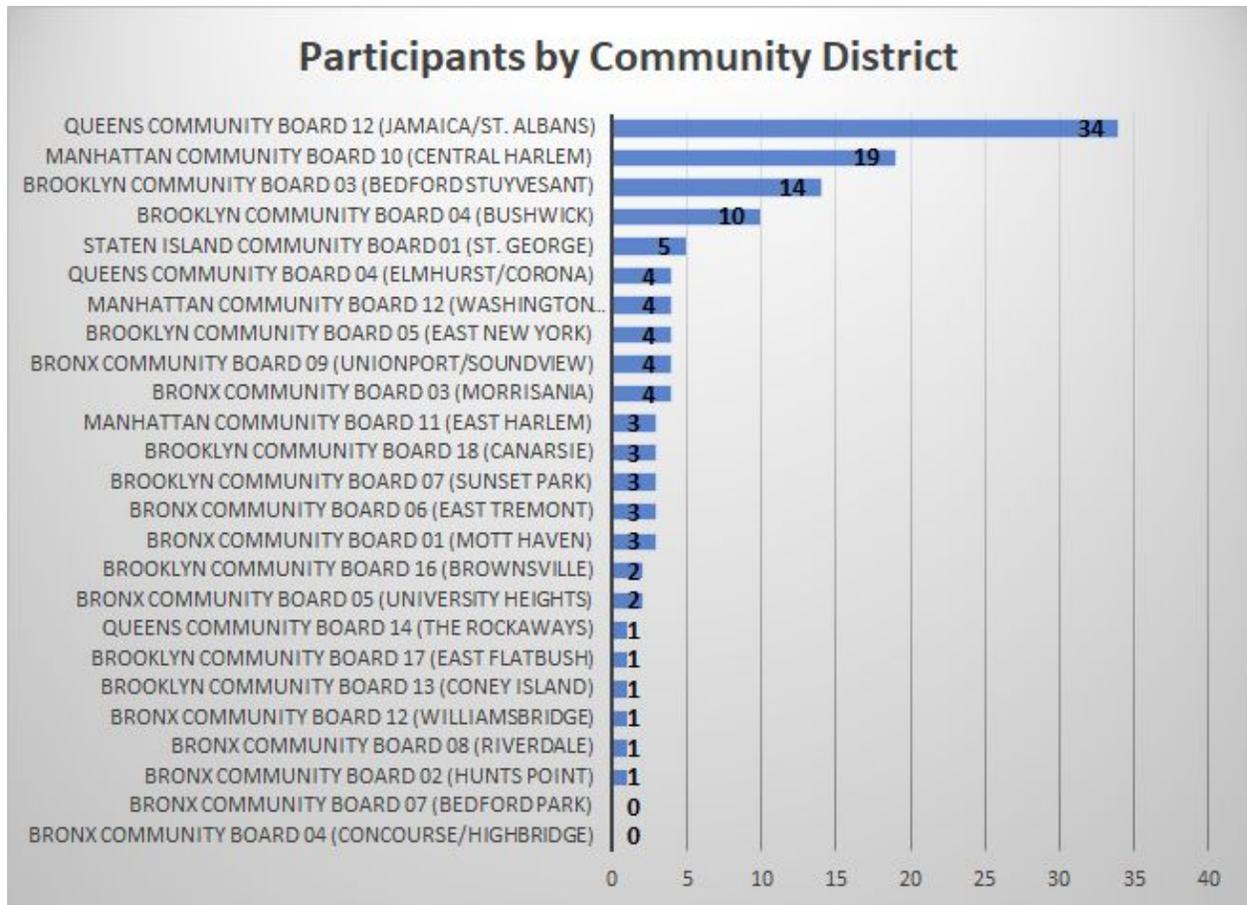


### Participants by Gender



### Participants Identifying as Transgender





Thank you

### Coro New York Leadership Center

- Amiya Miller, Youth Researcher, 17 years old
- Angel Torres, Virtual Facilitator, 17 years old
- Courtney Aubain, Social Media Manager, 18 years old
- Darlene Uzoigwe, Virtual Facilitator, 17 years old
- Herman Xie, Virtual Facilitator, 17 years old
- Ifeoluwa Aluko, Coalition Builder, 16 years old
- Jagdesch Ram, Coalition Builder, 18 years old
- Jahin Rahman, Virtual Facilitator, 18 years old
- Manahil Jafri, Virtual Facilitator, 18 years old
- Miranda Dobles, Platform Moderator, 17 years old
- Rachel Guarneros, Virtual Facilitator, 17 years old
- Silas Gaughran-Bedell, Youth Researcher, 17 years old

Francesco Tena, Director of PB Youth Fellowship  
 Isabel Luciano, Assistant Director of PB Youth Fellowship

## Civic Engagement Commission

Wendy Trull, Senior Advisor

Daniella Eras, Participatory Budgeting Advisor

Yazmany Arboleda, CEC Artist in Residence