

LGBTQIA+

2020 Innovation: When COVID-19 hit, the **NYC Unity Project** developed a resource database in collaboration with hundreds of LGBTQ program and service providers from across the five boroughs. The database shares available resources specific to mental health, physical health, community support, food assistance, legal help, housing, and financial support. The database continues to grow as resources are added through additional insights. LGBTQ New Yorkers who have been impacted by COVID-19 can continue to utilize the resources for as long as the pandemic lasts.

PARKS & PUBLIC SPACE

2020 Innovation: Having the unique position of operating a public park and running an office of essential operational parks staff, **Brooklyn Bridge Park (BBP)** prioritized finding the balance towards sustaining both of these in the midst of the global pandemic. Moving quickly, the organization kept salaries and benefits unaffected and provided additional compensation and benefits for their essential workers. Further supporting staff safety, BBP had hired a social worker to help support staff just before the pandemic began and having this role in the organization was critical in providing full support to help staff navigate challenges related to the impact of COVID-19. In similar nature to decisions made to support health and wellness during the pandemic, BBP reflected on what could better cultivate inclusion and belonging at the organization in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement. As such, this is the first ever black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) Affinity Network at BBP. The network promotes a safe space for unfiltered dialogue for staff of color across the organization. It allows for cross-dialogue between the network and senior leadership in support of institutional cultural competency and fostering inclusive practices to support future professional mobility for all.

Based on an interview with Sarah Krauss, Chief of Staff and Vice President, Public Affairs at Brooklyn Bridge Park

SMALL BUSINESSES & ECONOMIC DEV

2020 Innovation: Small businesses across the city were left especially vulnerable as a result of the shelter-in-place mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to keep these vital institutions alive, the **NYC Department Small Business Services (SBS)** developed an emergency loan and grant fund for thousands of small businesses that have faced economic hardship. Due to its popularity, SBS has since secured additional loans and funding streams, designated new teams to support financial assistance to business owners through public and private programs, and launched a webinar series that supports business owners and boosts digital engagement with the agency. In addition, 2020 saw the release of *Be NYC's report Advancing Black Entrepreneurship in New York*. The pandemic exposed how critical it is, now more than ever, to support black businesses through equitable financing, scalability, and strengthening connections in communities.

Based on an interview with Nicole Brownstein, Digital Communications Specialist at the NYC Department of Small Business Services

BUILDINGS & SUSTAINABILITY

2020 Innovation: COVID-19 and the racial justice movement have reinforced the City's commitment to addressing inequities facing New Yorkers today. City agencies are working together and in partnership with community stakeholders to study the intersections of climate, racial, generational, income, and health inequity. The goal of the study is to improve New Yorkers' access to food, water, shelter, and heating/cooling. Specific responses to the pandemic have included consulting with hotel owners on space availability to support food distribution programs and storage. Due to sheltering-in-place mandates, conventional cooling options were no longer feasible for the most vulnerable New Yorkers during the heat waves. Several City agencies, including the **Mayor's Office of Sustainability**, collaborated to launch *Get Cool NYC* to provide free air conditioners to low-income seniors across the City. All of these interventions play a role in how City agencies solved for systemic inequality related to the quality of life of all residents.

Based on an interview with Elizabeth Kelly, Senior Policy Advisor at the NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & DEMOCRACY

2020 Innovation: Founded as a volunteer-led organization, **Knock for Democracy** recruits, trains, and mobilizes a community of volunteers to engage with voters in districts across the country in order to make a meaningful impact on critical and competitive elections on the ballot. Data indicates one-on-one direct voter contact and canvassing can impact election outcomes. With the global pandemic mandating shelter-in-place orders, the organization pivoted their model to the virtual space, and building the capacity of large groups of volunteers on Zoom to confidently facilitate effective phone banking across swing districts.

ARTS & CULTURE

2020 Innovation: Understanding the impact that the global pandemic would have on their direct stakeholders, **Theater of the Oppressed NYC (TONYC)** engaged with their philanthropic partners in order to secure emergency relief funding. This initiative was designed by staff and in collaboration with the local TONYC stakeholders. Jokers collaborated to determine how much funding would be allocated for one another, with a commitment that all of them are to be allocated the same amount of money. These emergency grants were utilized to support rent payments, feed themselves and their families, and have other economic security during this emergency. This grant has also provided performers with the capacity to be able to continue their engagement in TONYC programming remotely, including participating online in Forum Theatre, panel discussions, and other opportunities that allow members to reimagine possibilities for virtual advocacy and community building.

Based on an interview with Megan Gomez, Executive Director of Theater of the Oppressed NYC

LIBRARIES

2020 Innovation: All three of the New York City public library systems pivoted their **Culture Pass** program (a partnership between the libraries and the **NYC Department of Cultural Affairs**) to launch free community programming in the virtual space in alliance with 60+ cultural institutions- in lieu of in-person reservations. The **NYPL** launched Online Storytime to keep children's minds engaged and activated during the pandemic and provides multilingual access and prioritizes authors of color. The **Brooklyn Public Library** was able to continue their popular Drag Queen Story Hour to young audiences through Instagram Live. And the **Queens Public Library** is continuing to provide a wide spectrum of educational, technical, and creative virtual courses.

FOOD ACCESS & MUTUAL AID

2020 Innovation: The **Community Fridge** movement is a mutual aid system designed to tackle food insecurity in New York City neighborhoods at the hyper-local scale. It is centered around a fridge placed outside in a central neighborhood spot allowing residents access to come by and take free food as needed, free of inquiry or judgement. Inside fridges, one can find produce, eggs, dairy and bread, stocked by fellow neighbors. The community fridge movement not only provides a system for food access, but also fosters tighter relationships and bonds across local residents. Fridges are on track to stay indefinitely, as they've demonstrated a grassroots model for addressing food insecurity, eliminating food waste, and amplifying equity across neighborhoods.

TECHNOLOGY & ACADEMIA

2020 Innovation: **Break Through Tech** works at the intersection of academia and industry to propel more underrepresented women into higher education and careers in tech. In partnership with universities across the country, including the colleges across the CUNY system, Break Through Tech leads a series of innovative and accessible programs focused on opening doors to women from college entry to their first jobs in tech, with the goal of achieving gender equality in tech. To ensure rising undergraduate freshmen and sophomores were able to participate under the COVID-19 context, Break Through Tech pivoted their robust programs to the virtual context. A positive takeaway with this transition includes new digital learning activities that can be incorporated into future program iterations, whether programs decide to meet in-person or virtually.

Based on information shared by Debbie Marcus, Senior Director of Programs of Break Through Tech

URBAN PLANNING

2020 Innovation: As cited from its name, **Design For Six Feet** was established as a direct response to the pandemic, and its impact on the urban environment. The initiative began as a crowd-sourced collection of visions and ideas through *Instagram* for social connectivity at a physical distance. It has since evolved into a collaborative process that brings together community members, planners, designers, and municipalities to innovate for the future of the City. The project has provided an opportunity for ideating and problem-solving during real world challenges and allows for stakeholders to witness the evolution of public space in their community over time. Since launching, Design For Six Feet has taken idea from prototype to implementation in the built environment. Promoting a shared street concept for reopening Main Street in Hudson, New York and a public competition to incorporate *PLAY* into the streets of Newburgh, New York. Both interventions have cultivated opportunities for youth engagement and community evaluation.

Based on an interview with Kaja Kuhl, Co-Founder of Design For Six Feet

EDUCATION

2020 Innovation: Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education is a critical component of the **Computer Science for All (CS4All)** initiative, as it helps to build the roadmap for equitable teaching practices to take shape in public education. To date, CS4All has trained 100 key teachers and leaders in equitable practices, in order to increase their racial literacy amongst other equity-based topics. As COVID-19 demonstrated challenges, further amplified by the digital divide, in carrying out equity based work in computer science curriculum, CS4All published its *Equitable Practices Remote Teaching Guide* for educators. Since its release, it has been picked up by teachers citywide, nationwide, and internationally, distributed at the International CS4All Conference, and shared with the Computer Science Teachers Association- not to mention has been adapted by many school districts and computer science education organizations.

Based on information shared by Christy Crawford, Director of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education for the NYC Department of Education's CS4All Initiative

TRANSPORTATION & TRANSIT

2020 Innovation: **The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)** has always taken pride in fostering community and creating space for knowledge exchange and learning between transportation agencies across the U.S. When the global pandemic hit, NACTO quickly launched a COVID-19 related peer network for cross-communication in addition to the COVID-19 Transportation Response Center. These platforms have supported decision-making at agencies in real time and has become a community repository with shared multimedia resources such as photos, audio recordings, and webinars with transportation experts tackling mobility issues in their cities. Inspired by the emerging practices captured through these new platforms, NACTO launched *Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery*. This publication, which has been translated into 9 languages so far to expand its reach, is an ever-evolving resource that reveals the emerging practices in cities around the world in response to the pandemic. It leads with the strategy that long-term economic recovery must be equitable, sustainable, and enduring, and that collective models and accessibility to transportation is critical for a just recovery.

Based on information shared by Eduarda Aun, Program Associate for the Global Designing Cities Initiative at NACTO.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

HEALTH EQUITY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

2020 Innovation: The global pandemic has unleashed much destruction and harm to marginalized people within the criminal justice system specifically. This is especially prevalent for people living with HIV and other stigmatized diseases, as the existing legacy of criminalization is further perpetuating irrational carceral responses towards addressing COVID-19, and the impact it has on them. As a response, the **Center for HIV Law and Policy** saw two critical opportunities for intervention. The first opportunity convened a national group of criminal justice and legal stakeholders. The convening helped to develop a set of pathways for criminal justice professionals incorporating public health principles into their COVID-19 response. The second opportunity established a COVID-19 Working Group of attorneys, criminal justice professionals, and other legal stakeholders to provide planning, analysis, and other support around a bill proposed to the New York State Legislature (Senate Bill S8450A and Assembly Bill A10500A), that was unanimously passed by both Chambers, and is awaiting Governor Andrew Cuomo's signature. The Working Groups' efforts ultimately protect the privacy of COVID-19 contract tracing data collected, to ensure that data is not funneled into the hands of law enforcement.

Based on an interview with Amir Sadeghi, National Policy and Partner Strategist at the Center for HIV Law and Policy

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCACY

2020 Innovation: Domestic violence saw a dramatic increase since the COVID-19 pandemic began, as people required to shelter-in-place created a dangerous and even life-threatening scenario for some victims and barriers for enforcement and safety for others. The **Gender Justice Task Force** is a group of 60+ from across the social sector (non-profit, advocacy, and survivors) charged with advocacy on behalf of survivors to better coordinate services for survivors with each other and with the City. Their work is more important now more than ever, and the Task Force works to build a model to better address domestic violence in New York City and how survivors access support and services in the various systems they encounter, ideally, in closer partnership with the City's agencies and providers.

Inspired from an interview with Teri Yuan, Survivor and Steering Committee Member of the Gender Justice Task Force

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

2020 Innovation: In August, **Make the Road NY** and **Hester Street** collaborated on a report titled *150 Days Later: Unemployed and Excluded*. The report serves as an advocacy tool that quantifies the economic realities facing immigrant communities in New York City today. It summarizes findings from a region-wide and multifaceted survey of 244 working class immigrants and people of color following-up on the economic pain that has persisted in these communities since the spring. The survey includes data on the challenges with sustaining jobs and housing, in addition to inaction from the government for the undocumented and concludes with action items for systemic change.

