

DEAR RESIDENTS,

Neighborhoods like this have long been shaped by demographic change. Crown Heights was once home to the second largest community of free Blacks in the United States, and to Brooklyn's first racially integrated public school.

But this neighborhood has also been defined by stories that are harder for us to tell — from the White flight that led to neighborhood disinvestment in the mid-20th century, to the 1991 riots that erupted between the area's Hasidic Jewish and Black communities.

We're at a moment where we're writing a new story. And whether you're a longtime resident of the neighborhood shocked by rising rents and changing faces, or a newcomer just trying to figure out the best spot for a bagel, we all have a role to play in how this story unfolds.

We could look down as we walk to and from the subway, or we could look up to say hello.

We could move through familiar circles, or we could get to know our neighbors.

We could buy with one click, or we could take a few steps around the corner.

We could sit by as those around us struggle to get by, or we could show them we give a damn.

If you believe our cities can be places where different races, classes, and generations do more than just live side-by-side, then consider being part of the Crown Heights story — and shaping one you'd be proud to tell.

LOW

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

HIGH



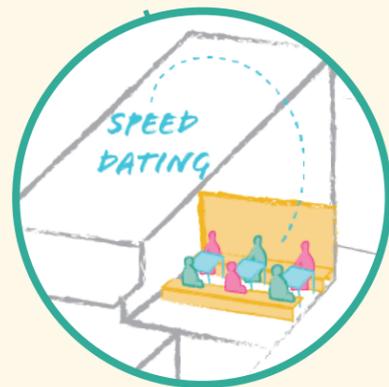
Design signage that playfully nudges people to interact and engage with one another.

Installations on digital LinkNYC portals already visualize some neighborhood-centric signage. Public art or provocative conversation starters could complement them (e.g., “Say hi to your neighbor. They won’t bite.” or “We know you like the people on your screen. What about the people on your street?”) could be looped into the stalls within this neighborhood — there are 10 LinkNYC along the Nostrand Avenue corridor alone, translating to a visible and well-distributed footprint. Tone and visual style could be human and provocative, in the style of public art installations by Candy Change — who is behind a range of urban art projects, such as the “Before I die” wall.¹⁹¹



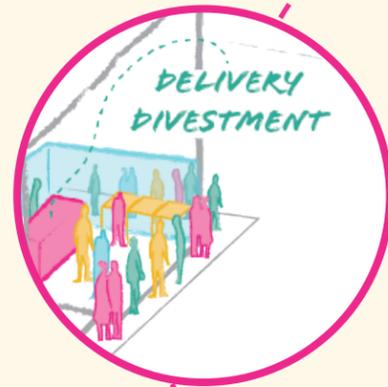
Develop a guide for newcomers that helps them understand and engage in the neighborhood.

This model could take the form of storefront signage, or in the form of door hangers or fliers distributed by a network of volunteers. The messaging would target newcomers in need of sociospatial literacy as they navigate a diverse and changing neighborhood like Crown Heights. Materials may include tips, a small business reference guide, and advocacy and volunteer opportunities. Neighbors in Action and Repair the World’s leadership have demonstrated interest in developing such messaging and programming. Said one interviewee, “This would have meant the world to me when I moved here.” Messaging and graphic identity would need to be visual, simple, and graphically clear, as Emily Talen has noted should be the case when distributing community-centric materials in racially diverse areas.¹⁹⁰



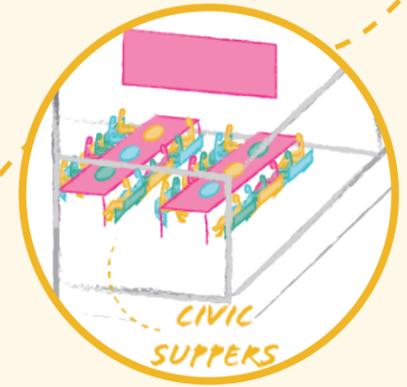
Hold a neighbor speed dating night — a playful entry point for building connection.

Local restaurants with varying clienteles could volunteer to host such an event, with the goal of getting a diverse set of locals together for quick “getting to know you” sessions — the purpose would not just be to facilitate an introduction, but would be to get locals in the door for deeper engagement on shared work or projects. As with one interviewee’s ‘We Are Crown Heights’ portrait series, participants could be matched based on shared interests. Advocacy or other volunteer opportunities could also be advertised within the context of the event.



Organize residents to do a week-long opt-out of delivery, to back local business.

Responding to widespread concern among business owners about the rise of online delivery — and its implications for foot traffic, community, and profits — this proposal would require an organizing effort in the neighborhood. Its aim would not be to change the market and technological forces that are driving a rise in delivery services like GrubHub, but to raise consciousness among residents about the impacts of their choices on local business decisions. Guidance on “buying local” may also be embedded into “Welcome Pack” messaging to shift consumer consciousness. A survey following the fifth year of the Small Business Saturday® campaign found promising results on the program’s impact — indicating similar efforts may help shift behavior among consumers.¹⁹²



Hold a series of ‘civic suppers’ with a diverse group of locals to build ties and bolster advocates.

Supper clubs or food-based models for relationship-building have gained prominence in recent years — particularly in the wake of the 2016 presidential election. The People’s Supper is one notable example — a national network focused on bringing people together over conversation.¹⁹³ Such precedents, however, focus more on shared conversation than they do shared purpose and work. This model would focus not just on relationship-building across races, but also on generating civic participation, anti-racism, and advocacy efforts, particularly among newer, predominantly White residents. The model may also benefit from nested racial affinity groups — drawing from anti-racism work, in which White people and people of color have nested communities to work through identity-specific issues.¹⁹⁴ Local non-profit Repair the World has expressed interest in coordinating, and in the words of one interviewee, “if neighborhood restaurants got on board it would be a great way to bring people in.”

ENDNOTES

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