

**Lowline Community Engagement  
Public Workshop 4 (Programming)  
Breakout Session Timing: 2 hours**

Prepared by Karp Strategies | May 10, 2017

**Workshop Date:** May 6, 2017, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

**Number of Attendees:** Approximately 15 people across 5 topic tables.

**Who were attendees:** A diverse mix of community members.

**Facilitators:** Ali Sutherland-Brown, Erik Kath, Rebecca Karp, Cecilia, Malena Silva.

**Note takers:** Neha Krishnan, Vivian Huang, Michael Walker, Konstantinos Psychogios, Jessica Kluge.

**Introduction**

This memo is intended to provide a summary analysis of the ideas shared in the fourth Public Community Design Workshop conducted by Karp Strategies and the Lowline as part of the Lowline's formal community engagement process. The analysis here presents the ideas and key themes raised across five topic tables, and specific programming ideas for each topic. This memo further synthesizes feedback that resonated across the topic tables.

This document is not intended to be representative of the views of all members of CD3 or the Lower East Side, or to draw definitive conclusions regarding the needs of the community. It is presented as part of an iterative engagement process, and will be used alongside findings from other public community design workshops and small engagement activities to form a more holistic picture over time.

**Structure of the Workshop**

Public Workshops 3 and 4 were designed to focus on programming related to five topics: Health and Wellness, Recreation, Science and Technology, Arts and Culture, and Education. The goal of these workshops was to gain an understanding of how the community envisions using the Lowline. To this end, the five topics were chosen by analyzing community feedback from the first two engagement meetings led by Karp Strategies and the Lowline's community work over the past several years.

Precedent images of activities, events, and programs were shown at each table to focus discussion about a given topic. Participants were asked to react to these images and state if they were representative of their desires for the Lowline. Facilitators led discussions through these images and a series of follow-up questions intended to guide discussion. The major points of discussion at each table are as follows.

### **Discussions at topic tables**

#### ***Health and Wellness (2 participants)***

Participants at this table discussed ideas directly and indirectly connected to health and wellness, guided by their experiences living in a congested city and by one participant's background in public health. A consistent discussion theme was the need to ensure diversity and inclusivity in the Lowline, because any segment of the population feeling unwelcome at a public space could have a detrimental effect on public health as a whole. Participants consistently brought up examples of spaces that only attracted a single demographic, in order to explain what the Lowline should not be.

The table came up with several innovative measures to ensure inclusivity. One idea was to test the popularity of various programs with only local area residents in attendance, and using their reactions to create programming that suits the community. Another was to create a chalkboard wall to allow residents and other passers-by to record their ideas and feelings about the Lowline.

Specific programming suggestions centered around topics of food production and consumption, access for seniors, and the need for unstructured spaces. One participant provided the example of fruit carts in East Harlem that sell fresh produce to residents at cheaper prices than grocery stores, suggesting that this could be adopted in the Lowline to partially address the lack of supermarkets in parts of the Lower East Side. Another participant explained that while activities for seniors was a good idea, it was also important to have spaces where they may simply congregate and socialize, with no structured programming. The idea of unstructured green spaces to just 'be', was echoed for other users of the park as well.

#### ***Education (4 participants)***

Discussion at this table centred around three major themes: educating youth in the community, supporting art education for all ages groups, and growing food underground. Several participants emphasised the need to support youth in the neighborhood by giving priority to local schools for use of the space, free early education for local lower income families, and creating after-school programs for local youth as a means to prevent crime. Another suggestion raised was to use the Lowline as a space to produce food, creating opportunities for the local community to learn about urban agriculture while selling fresh, local produce back to community members at low prices. Participants supported accepting food stamps in return for this produce.

Participants then discussed the role of art, and suggested creating a program where local artists teach youth about art in various forms. They also supported the creation of a graffiti wall to allow free expression. Participants proposed that the history of the Lowline Space as a trolley terminal, and its lighting technology take the form of educational exhibits in the proposed park. In summary, the table suggested using the Lowline to support education with the aim of improving the lives of community members.

### ***Recreation (2 participants)***

Participants at the recreation table ideated a range of suggestions for the Lowline. They emphasized the importance of cultural diversity, and suggested that the Lowline be programmed to support two types of visitors: first-timers/tourists, and local residents. They agreed that the Lowline could function as a space for different demographics to mingle, suggesting interactive technology exhibits to allow visitors to engage with each other, a speed networking event, and ice-breaker questions posed at the entrance of the park.

Urban agriculture was a popular topic for discussion at this table, raising ideas for how to use the green space underground. Participants suggested growing and selling food to help fund the Lowline, renting small plots to locals for community gardens, and creating a farmer's market. Other specific programming ideas included a stage for performances, green spaces with flowers and fruit plants, a nature-focused art gallery, and rotating art exhibits that maintain and generate interest for repeat visits.

### ***Science and Technology (4 participants)***

The Science and Technology table framed their discussion through the role of technology in modern life. On one hand, participants suggested creating a 'cell phone oasis' where signals are blocked and Wi-Fi is switched off for a few hours every week, encouraging people to engage with their surroundings. On the other hand, they suggested exhibitions that showcase technology - the technologies within the Lowline such as the underground solar lighting, and the history of the space as a trolley terminal. Participants expressed interest in making the space a tech incubator, showcasing developments in the field, and providing visitors with tablets that allow them to navigate the space in real time. A specific suggestion was to use an augmented reality game like Pokémon Go to attract repeat visitors.

### ***Arts and Culture (3 participants)***

Participants at this table spoke about a wide range of topics including arts education, film and theater, comedy, dance, and art lessons, language lessons, and visual arts exhibits. There was support for providing language and cultural lessons, teaming up with local non-profits such as the Chinese-American Planning Council. Participants emphasised the diverse nature of the Lower East Side, and supported the idea of local artists conducting classes in the Lowline. The table also grappled with issues of funding, being split about whether or not to charge an entry

fee to visitors, and whether to do so selectively. An interesting programming suggestion was to create a space to support rolling visual arts exhibits, with the public allowed to watch the process of creating art.

### ***Themes Across Tables***

The following themes and suggestions resonated across all tables.

- Programming the Lowline for the benefit of the local community, to support improved conditions and opportunities for them.
- Ensuring that programming welcomes a diverse group of visitors, and is not exclusionary to anyone.
- Conducting permanent on-going engagement with the community regarding the functions of and programming at the Lowline.
- Balancing the proportion of visitors, by limiting tourists and giving preference to community members.
- Allowing free access to the Lowline, or charging nominal fees so as to promote access to visitors of all incomes.
- Finding other ways to fund the Lowline – through markets, restaurants or cafés, private events, and corporate sponsorship.
- Discussion about whether allowing dogs and other pets into the Lowline is appropriate.
- Providing opportunities for growing local food.