

**THE
NEW
SCHOOL**

COLLABORATORY

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COLLABORATORY SYMPOSIUM 2018 : A SNAPSHOT

The New School Collaboratory, a university-wide initiative, provides diverse ways for our community to share, explore and create knowledge through public scholarship and socially engaged learning. Symposia, workshops, action-research, and a digital platform provide contexts to enrich collaborations among faculty, students, and our community and organizational partners as they work to create a more just, resilient and equitable society.

The New School Collaboratory is housed within the Schools of Public Engagement in collaboration with the Provost Office.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank The Rockefeller Foundation for its generous support to The New School Collaboratory.

There have been many individuals who worked to make the Symposium a successful and enriching experience, including:

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Michele Kahane, Associate Dean, Schools of Public Engagement

Masoom Moitra, Special Projects Director

EXECUTIVE DEAN'S NOTE



I am delighted to have been the host of the inaugural Collaboratory Symposium, a new space for The New School community to reflect upon approaches to co-creating a more just, resilient, and equitable world. Since our inception, the Schools of Public Engagement, the founding division of The New School, have been committed to challenging the status quo to create public good. We do this through a blend of engaged scholarship, teaching, and socially-engaged practice.

The work of this community touches upon the essential challenges of our time: environmental, climate, and social justice; inequality in education; economic opportunity; migration, and much more. What most excited me about the Collaboratory Symposium proceedings, and what I believe excited all of the participants, was how much we had to learn from each other. From practical tools for community organizing, to how data visualization can activate and educate communities, to how media-making can liberate and inspire the imagination, we inspired each other with new modes and methods for advancing and refining our work.

Your approaches to learning, research, and making are diverse in methods, scale, geography, partners, and intended outcomes. This diversity provides an enormous opportunity for creating new knowledge about how to address complex issues and imagine new possibilities. This intersectionality of issues demands collaborative capacities and mindsets. As The New School approaches our centennial in 2019, the Collaboratory will continue to advance knowledge generation about engaged learning and public scholarship.

Mary Watson
Executive Dean, Schools of Public Engagement

A NOTE FROM THE CURATORS



As curators, our hope was to create an environment that promotes a culture of fearless exchange and the co-production of knowledge beyond disciplines that can contribute to creating a more just, resilient and equitable world. We took a leap of faith and made a call to practitioners, faculty and students across the university to come together and transcend institutional silos - and what a response we got!

In the current political and social moment that we are faced with, it seemed particularly urgent for faculty, students, community, partners and alumni who share the common goals of justice and equity, to have difficult conversations and strategize collectively.

The 2018 Collaboratory Symposium was, we hope, the first iteration of a community gathering that will repeat and evolve. The discussions that were held and relationships that were formed or reinforced during the Symposium regenerate all our expectations about what this community can do to advance our shared commitment to challenging the status quo through socially engaged learning and scholarship.

Michele Kahane and Masoom Moitra,
Co-curators of the 2018 Collaboratory Symposium



The Collaboratory hosted its first Symposium on Friday, April 27th at the Theresa Lang Community and Student Center at The New School. More than 100 attendees gathered for the day-long series of thought provoking conversations, peer-exchanges and community building sessions, as we put forth the question: **“How might we advance The New School’s legacy of challenging the status quo through socially engaged learning and scholarship?”**

Consistent with The New School’s foundation in social justice-focused teaching and learning, the Symposium started with a moving speech from Veronica, a worker at The New School’s Cafeteria, in an appeal to gain support for her and her colleagues from imminent university policy changes (an update on the success of the campaign is available [here](#)). This was followed by welcome addresses from Tim Marshall, the Provost and Mary Watson, the Executive Dean of the Schools of Public Engagement, highlighting the trajectory of the Collaboratory since its inception in 2013 and its current relevance as an integral part of the university.

Most of the more than 100 participants who were in attendance were faculty, students, alumni, community partners and staff from various colleges of The New School. The largest presence was that of full-time and part-time faculty, and it was a unique honor to have so many exemplary practitioners and scholars committed to socially-engaged practice and scholarship sit across each other at tables, as they exchanged strategies, concerns and critical reflections that cut across disciplines.



“ To achieve equity, we really have to find a way to be in conversation with one another, to identify what it is that we need to solve, try to understand it from multiple perspectives and then actually *drop* the narrow confines of our own experiences of how we think and feel about things.” - Maya Wiley

Moderated by Michele Kahane (Faculty Director of the Collaboratory and Associate Dean of SPE), the panel discussion was focused on big-picture questions surrounding the ethics of engagement, partnerships of academic institutions with communities, recurring challenges, areas that need support, tools that have proved successful in the past, ways of evaluating impact, and critical reflections from the diverse range of experiences brought to the table by panelists: Maya Wiley (Henry Cohen Professor of Urban Policy and Management & Senior Vice President for Social Justice), Rob Robinson (Co-founder and member of the Leadership Committee of the Take Back the Land Movement, Staff at NESRI), Cynthia Lawson (Associate Professor of Integrated Design, Parsons & Founder, DEED Lab) , Jess Irish (Assistant Professor of Design and Technology & Director of Academic Affairs for the School, Parsons), Joseph Heathcott (Associate Professor of Urban Studies, Lang), Ben Wilson (Program Assistant for the Institute for Transformative Mentoring, Center for New York City Affairs) and Masoom Moitra (Alumni, Founder of Schools of Hope & Faculty, Integrated Design, Parsons).

The panel generated a vibrant conversation that touched on key points of equity and justice that need to be addressed while hosting community-engaged projects at The New School, while offering nuanced perspectives on how faculty, students and community partners have varied roles to play in ensuring success and impact. The discussion and subsequent questions kicked-off a high level of energy and enthusiasm in the room that was channeled into a rigorous set of exchanges that lasted throughout the day.

To view the entire panel discussion, please click [here](#).



Roundtable discussion themes included : Education and Social Justice, Racial Equity and Access in the Arts, Creating Transformation through Public Dialogue, Community-engaged Social Ventures, Co-producing Knowledge through Public Scholarship, De-constructing Race & Power, Imagining Change with Youth Partners, Media and Technology for Public Engagement, Mobilizing for Environmental Justice, New Spaces for Civic Action, Participatory Design with Communities, Strategizing for Economic & Socio-spatial Justice, Preparing for Community Engagement, and Visualizing Data and Reality for Social Action.

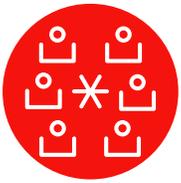
A comprehensive list of roundtable facilitators can be viewed [here](#).

“ As a community organizer it was always taboo to work closely with students and academia because the narrative was that all they often do is pour out knowledge into you. But I said that I have to open my mind and go into these spaces to trigger a process of reciprocal learning- the community comes into the academy, and the academy into the community in cycles to continue regenerating and sharing knowledge.” - Rob Robinson

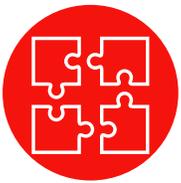
KEY TAKEAWAYS : SUMMARY



1 Understanding the significance of language & communication



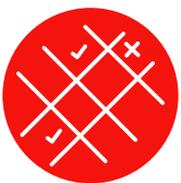
2 Acknowledging & addressing power dynamics while working in groups of diverse stakeholders



3 Identifying & strengthening partnerships/ resources within and outside university



4 Carrying forward a legacy of socially engaged learning, practice and scholarship



5 Measuring impact and evaluating the quality of community engaged projects and scholarship

KEY TAKEAWAYS : SUMMARY



6

Critically examining tools & methods for public engagement



7

Addressing institutional barriers in order to create a supportive internal infrastructure



8

Rooting community-engaged work in ethics, values and principles that center equity and justice



9

Spaces and platforms for accessible discussions and dialogues around public engagement

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS :



1 Understanding the significance of language & communication

- a. Everyone involved in the engagement process needs to be on the same page. Words like ‘community’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘transformation’ are used frequently, and there is a need to collectively determine the appropriate definitions, times and places to use them. For example, what kind of shared language can be co-developed across intergenerational spaces and people from different backgrounds and what does this mean?
- b. The exchange between all the different publics are very difficult to define and engage. Who are we talking about when we talk about the publics? Are they internal or external to the institution? Where are they located? What is the relationship between communities and publics?
- c. What does ‘Service Learning’ mean and how can we think about it more meaningfully as a moniker for this kind of work? What does it mean in terms of orienting people towards a different kind of listening in these kinds of learning situations?
- d. What is the right language while we work with youth? We don’t want to address them as being at-risk or under-served as it perpetuates the disconnect. The use of the term youth ‘partners’ versus ‘learners’ is very important, as students and youth who are involved in academic projects or classes externally need to be held up as leaders and co-designers in work being done by faculty when it engages them.
- e. What is public scholarship and how can we arrive at the definition of it through a set of share values? How can we implement and evaluate these values?
- f. Identify people who can become active bridges between different stakeholders, translate ideas or languages, communicate between groups and come up with collaborations that are meaningful and long-lasting.



2 Acknowledging & addressing power dynamics while working in groups of diverse stakeholders

- a. Students need to be well prepared even before engagement begins and they go outside the university classroom, including studies and strategies to deal with various levels of privilege among peers, faculty and partners.
- b. In the environmental justice world in particular, there is a need to be cognizant of power differences between really large and established mainstream environmental NGOs that are largely led by white, wealthy professionals and grassroots, frontline community organizations that are led by black and brown communities, and are often under resourced. There are huge differences in agendas and resources in these groups so they shouldn't all be treated the same way.
- c. Respect the historical expertise of community members and enable an environment of equity in partnerships wherein the learning and discovery process can flow both ways, and there is a sense of accountability.
- d. What does it mean to give up seats at the table? Address privilege within The New School so that those who have had the opportunity to sit at the table can begin to turn their roles over to those who haven't.
- e. Interrogate dialogues around transformation and examine why diverse stakeholders, both internally and externally, are interested in transformation in the first place. For example, what kind of social change and recognition of the change can really be offered through the arts, education, public policy etc.?
- f. How can debriefing be implemented without excusing students from really engaging with communities and yet sharing in a healthy way?
- g. There are many complicated and hard-hitting issues that come up in classrooms with youth, specifically around race and gender. How to navigate questions about race and gender in a classroom where youth are still figuring these things out?
- h. For students with English as a Second Language, what are the ways in which ideas can be communicated through creative and interesting practices that transcend language barriers?
- i. What are the ways to communicate how social justice can unfold outside the classroom to students in innovative ways? For example, inviting the Snow Day food truck, which brings incarcerated youth back into society in healthy and positive ways, to the university.



3

Identifying & strengthening partnerships/ resources within and outside university

- a. Students and alumni face challenges in seeking out external partners and faculty mentors who already have established relationships with the university and would be interested in working with them. External partners too do not have clear ways of reaching out to student groups, scholars or practitioners on the basis of common interests, goals and values, and instead depend on informal relationships to develop projects. Faculty do not have a robust platform through which to form collaborations across disciplines and schools. What are the different ways to connect, share resources, and carry ideas forward through partnerships and collaborations?
- b. Establish shared values and strong relationships between universities, researchers, students, faculty, organizations and different people inside organizations, by developing different modes of engagement that center human empathy and understanding
- c. How can faculty members and students maintain integrity of educational projects while meeting needs of community partners? Some interactions and expectations can be competing at some points, but finding a balance in most cases can lead to very productive and co-constructive outcomes.
- d. How can challenges of working with organizations that have a very different culture from that of faculty members or students at The New School be addressed? How can partner organizations work better with each other?
- e. Examine the possibilities of catalyzing public dialogue with external partners and what it looks like if that needs to first happen in our classrooms before we can take part in productive conversations outside. Organizations who consider partnering with universities also need to think about the kind of work that will happen inside the classroom before they partner through particular classes.



4

Carrying forward a legacy of socially engaged learning, practice and scholarship

- a. The New School has a unique history with respect to social engagement, and many other universities are not required or encouraged to create public dialogue within various disciplines in the way done by Vera List Center or Center for New York City Affairs. How can this be supported and continued?
- b. Map and share the different ways in which members of The New School have been creating formal or informal networks, challenged classroom dynamics and created syllabi that have transformed the ways in which teaching and learning happen in universities.
- c. Some faculty members have had to move out of the university and into spaces outside to work on important projects, since they found it challenging to work with barriers within the university.
- d. How can curriculum at The New School be designed in a participatory way, by involving community partners at every stage in the process?
- e. How can faculty and the administration at The New School better understand and adapt to the kinds of experiences students are having within and outside the classroom, particularly since the election?



Project Sound the Mound in action. It started as an idea: what would it mean to bring Freshkills Park and Arable Labs together to create site specific work that engages environmental issues, but found a home within the Transdisciplinary Design MFA program



5

Measuring impact and evaluating the quality of community engaged projects and scholarship

- a. Is it necessary to be able to measure impact while working on projects with a social purpose and community partners? Why would we do it and is it helpful to do so?
- b. Transformation through emotional change is not accurately measurable. In certain kinds of dialogues, people who are engaged can only experience the impact in the future through the creation of movements and execution of plans at a wider scale. Funders require reporting on assessment, quality etc., but can there be more creative ways to measure change that are inclusive and sensitive to context, types and scales of engagement?
- c. There is a need for a critical approach of how evaluation at The New School works and how it is succeeding or failing. What kind of evaluation infrastructure can we design that is based within universities, but can be informed by institutional stakeholders and other community partners? How can flows of accountability work not just within university, but from communities as well?
- d. Technicalities of evaluating the work of university professors to incentivize community-engaged scholarship needs to be considered in a context where everyone seems to be spread thin and priorities need to be made- this is where the conflict lies as everyone cannot do everything.



A visual comparison of NDVI analysis + True Color imagery from project Visualizing Pipeline Impacts of the Shale Gas Pipeline Impact in the Black Dirt Region of Orange County, NY



6

Critically examining tools & methods for public engagement

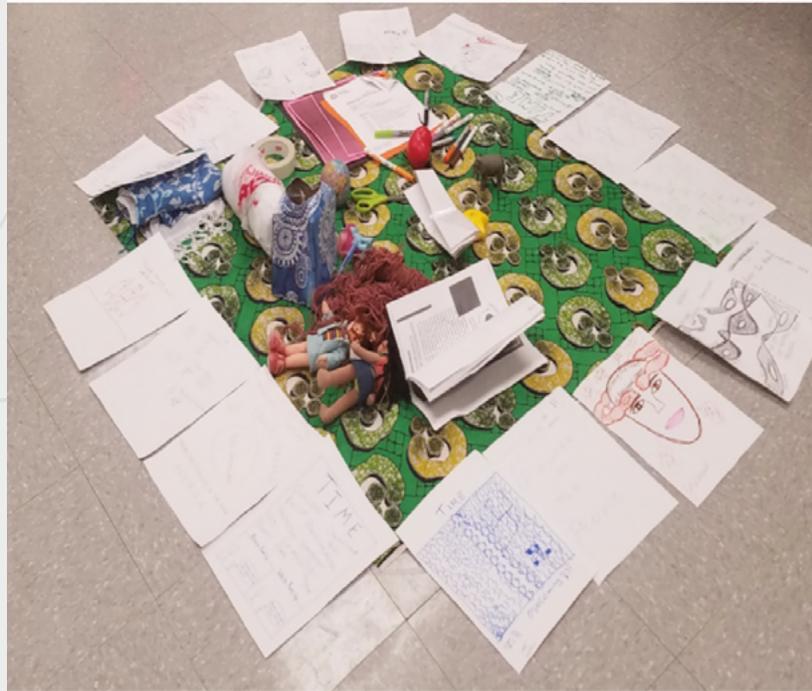
- a. How does the concept of ‘solutionalism’ in participatory design, especially when it comes from institutions, impact relationships with partners? Before jumping into solve problems, devote time to first understanding the problem together and allowing everyone involved time to explore that through mini-workshops, games, and special occasions for everyone in a project to get to know and trust each other.
- b. Technology should be perceived as a tool for public engagement, and not as an end or a solution in itself.
- c. Gratitude, pride and empathy are important aspects of an engagement process. Games and VR (Virtual Reality) can be perceived as pop cultural tools or machines for systems thinking that help us understand how systems work and teach empathy. Through games it is possible for the youngest of partners to learn that people think differently and interpret rules differently.
- d. How can the ongoing transdisciplinary conversations about data uncertainty at The New School help us have more substantial and important conversations about social issues that they are attempting to visualize and predict? How can data visualization be used as a tool to more actively bring about change?
- e. There is a need to think about strategically using and leveraging the tools that all of the partners have. For example, including communities and academics in technical, legal and political action needed to do effective, social-justice focused work.
- f. What are tools that are needed to achieve goals that diverse stakeholders and collaborators have while working on socially-engaged projects? How do these tools get activated and made relevant to communities who are involved as co-designers?
- g. Many socially-engaged projects are now producing sensitive data in large volumes. How is the data stored, secured and how is it actually activated for different stakeholders in the project? Who gets to activate it and for what purpose?
- h. Storytelling is a powerful and effective tool for engagement, and the power of stories has been instrumentalized to build analysis around what is happening, shaping and expanding our understanding of the world, and building communities.
- i. Even in the telling of digital experiences, we harken back to the familiar storytelling format. Textuality is controlled by power structures with different agendas that need to be recognized and dealt with before working with different media platforms and technological tools. What is the issue



6 Critically examining tools & methods for public engagement

of digital humanities and how did the humanities become a critical platform from which we look at new media and tools so that we are aware of them?

- j. Traditional research formats, like surveys, often fail while working with complex issues like segregation in public education in gentrified and under resourced areas. Creative approaches like tools from the Theater of the Oppressed, or other artistic and community organizing tools can be used to ensure a rich diversity in input collected. For example, in a project with the Center for Immigrant Families, researchers were able to tell their own stories and solicit stories from 300 other people through the use of tools of radical, participatory theater.



Critical Thinking Classroom exercise from the Institute of Transformative Mentoring: Invite participants to roughly sketch an image they would want on the cover of Time magazine today. Considering: What issue do I think is important for people to see?



Ujju Aggarwal leading a table on Deconstructing Race and Power : Reporting back on the power of storytelling in socially-engaged research projects.



7

Addressing institutional barriers in order to create a supportive internal infrastructure

- a. There have been several challenges around background checks like Go Pass and fingerprinting, while bringing youth partners to campus or taking students to work with external communities. If there is indeed institutional encouragement for faculty and students to work with communities, then this systemically exclusive barrier needs to be dismantled. Until then, when partnering with organizations in which youth are involved, there is a need to design inclusive and contextually sensitive background checks for students and external partner youth (e.g. to include those who don't have a social security number, or may be undocumented).
- b. Faculty at The New School work with some partner organizations that are smaller in size, capacity and power, but also very large institutions like the DOE- how do these scales present different challenges and barriers?
- c. The New School needs to be acknowledged as a privileged and resource rich organization as compared to some of the communities and places where faculty and students engage. For example, the Science Lab- in this anti-science moment, how can we leverage our resources and spaces to give youth in particular and general public access to science learning and to see science as a tool for social change?
- d. View access and social justice engagement through a multidirectional lens by investing resources on developing skills of low-income, students and parallelly develop institutional infrastructure to be able to prepare itself to support and meet the specific needs of students from marginalized backgrounds. The Parsons Scholars program is an important example of infrastructure committed to developing arts and design skills in youth, while preparing for institutions like Parsons & creative industries to open up and make spaces for young people and low income, students of color.
- e. In order to meaningfully engage a diverse community within the university, ensure that programs focus on access, rather than talent or technical abilities. Think critically about what it means to turn students from low-income, communities of color away? There is a need to be intentional in working with candidates and making sure they can walk away with resources and portfolio pieces that can benefit them in the future. For example, at the Parsons Scholars program, when students are not accepted, they are paired up with other organizations that they can participate in so that they are not leaving worse off than where they started before applying.
- f. In order to ensure equity and diversity within the institution, it is very important to be intentional in hiring and working with students who are people of color with varied immigration statuses, class backgrounds, LGBTQA+ community members and insert this into language in hiring process.



7

Addressing institutional barriers in order to create a supportive internal infrastructure

- g. What are the ways in which students can effectively partner and engage with youth in justice systems and activate within and outside the classroom to influence policy? For example, the I Have a Dream program at Lang worked towards raising the age of youth in the criminal justice system and support fundraising efforts for partners to sustain community action over longer periods of time.
- h. How can institutional racism within The New School administration be addressed?
- i. It is important to find and agree on a purpose before funding becomes a part of the discussion. Ask community for needs and really involve them- have faith in people that you can hand it over to them. The issue of funding versus financing for projects can be addressed by adopting empowering forms of ownership like co-ops. For example, the Corbin Hill Food Project which is led by longtime faculty member Dennis Derryck. There is a tendency to not focus on funding, and instead focus more on common goals. However it is important to consider a just model that allows autonomy and there are lots of opportunities to be creative with financing projects in empowering and sustainable models that won't go away.



Project DEED Lab: Students interacting with artisans at Panajachel, Guatemala and partner organization Mercado Global



Project DEED Lab: Artisans at Panajachel, Guatemala



8 Rooting community-engaged work in ethics, values and principles that center equity and justice

- a. While politically organizing with communities, there are a lot of nuances and granularity that academics and students may not always appreciate or understand right from the beginning. It is important to acknowledge this, make an effort to learn and build relationships towards self-transformation, mutuality, solidarity. It takes time and trust, and there is a need to be very mindful of these concepts while doing community-engaged work. For example, the Jemez principles for democratic organizing are 6 key principles for how to collaborate with each other and communities while putting community voices first.
- b. Seriously address the culture of parachuting in and out of projects, or one off engagements that can be really problematic as they are short-lived and don't have long lasting effects. They are usually exploitative in nature- more beneficial in enhancing the portfolio of students and faculty members, rather than being of any actual use to already under-resourced community partners. A variety of scales need to be worked with and it is important to consider what is appropriate in different contexts.
- c. Clear communication is very important in ensuring positive outcomes during engagement, especially when working on projects with international communities with vastly different cultural, social, economic and political backgrounds.
- d. Robust relationships can be built through lateral flows of knowledge and closing the triangle, by sitting around the table and asking- what is your north star? This is also the right time to identify differences, nuances and commonalities with potential partners. This slow and iterative process of relationship building is essential to prepare for community-engaged projects and should not be overlooked or rushed. Time and commitment leads to the building of faith, comfort, trust and belief in each other and usually leads to successful and long-term partnerships that live beyond the classroom.
- e. Change interventions designed by faculty and students might be overturned, but relationships that are built with communities outlast all of it and can be a source of creating long-lasting transformation.
- f. There is value in being invited into neighborhoods by communities, rather than providing unsolicited advice or swooping in to "save them", when they have not indicated signs of being welcoming or willing as equal partners. How can deep-rooted biases and imperialist attitudes in faculty, students and disciplines be pulled apart, critiqued and reflected upon before designing projects, curriculum or papers that involve working with marginalized communities? How can there be a sense of accountability in such situations?



9 Spaces and platforms for accessible discussions and dialogues around public engagement

- a. How can Public Seminar and the Collaboratory move towards the goal of co-producing knowledge and doing public scholarship? These digital spaces are ostensibly open- how can they be made even more open? In order to make them more accessible, use existing spaces and platforms to drill deep into where people are, so that they can be met where they are.
- b. Youth of color as most vulnerable population- how do we build a platform for them to tell their own stories and leverage the power of storytelling? Avoid tokenizing them in this process, even if this is well intentioned. Make a targeted effort to connect youth to ideas of engaged learning and platforms created around it. Find out more about how they receive knowledge, filter through knowledge, what they care about and how the content can be made appealing to them.
- c. How can there be a shift of these public dialogues from their current location inside the university to communities around these conversations and a genuine effort to co-produce knowledge in a way that is expansive? How can co-produced knowledge systems be made sustainable, for e.g. public libraries, and how we can learn from existing systems? How do we transform our own biases about disciplinary practices, people, about who should be there when, where they take place? What is the physicality of spaces where knowledge can be co- produced-on our campus, in storefronts, neighborhoods, at a community organization? What are the barriers in making movements and fluidity across these spaces happen?
- d. Exploration of the idea of productive crisis in public dialogues- how to make opportunities for safe spaces and brave spaces within those dialogues and not veer away from challenging dialogues but actually be holding space open for that to continue- what does this require? What are the places where risk comes into dialogue and how to lean towards it rather than lean away from it?
- e. Strategies and efforts to dismantle race and power can begin by acknowledging that these systems actually exist, and then exploring disconnect between faculty, community partners, students, and leadership.



FEEDBACK AND RESPONSES

A brief survey was distributed to all participants during and after the event, and an advisory meeting is scheduled for the end of May with representatives from across the University to ensure that The New School's Collaboratory can continue to grow in positive directions in upcoming years.

The survey results were overwhelmingly positive, with over 90% of attendees voting for an annual or bi-annual event. Participants appreciated the diversity of perspectives that were brought into the room, covering a wide range of disciplines and demographics. According to several responses, this helped facilitators and attendees to break out of institutional silos. The array of themes and depth of discussions were seen to be of value, along with the well prepared facilitation by faculty, alumni and community partners. Several participants wrote to us, telling us about new partnerships and potential collaborations that they were exploring through people they networked with at the event.

In the future, attendees want to see greater participation of community partners and students, and more targeted outreach to ensure this. There were requests for a system for peer-exchange and reflection that can last throughout the year, beyond the symposium. There was not enough time to fill out the interactive community asset mapping exercises, and participants felt a need for it, especially among faculty, to better understand and exchange best practices, strategies and resources. Individual input can be collected from participants in the future, by asking them to share their thoughts on individual post-its, as suggested by one survey response. There was also a call for the acknowledgement of the specific challenges faced by international students, more rounds and rotations among participants, and fewer breakout groups.