Directions
CUNY in the Heights is located at 5030 Broadway between 213th and 214th Streets in Manhattan. Two nearby subway options are:

- Take the A train to 207th Street. Walk three blocks north to 213th and Broadway.
- Take the 1 train to 215th St. and Broadway. When you exit the station just walk one block south and the building is there on 214th St. and Broadway.
Introduction

The Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) is in the final stages of a comprehensive redesign and reconstruction of its CUNY in the Heights (CITH) facility. With the addition of 15,000 additional square feet, the newly introduced facility has significantly more classroom and lab space that will allow for a substantial expansion of academic and workforce programming. And while the building adds to the overall footprint of the College, its location and history makes it a unique space that will operate as more than just an extension of BMCC. As a facility established to serve New Yorkers in the Inwood, Washington Heights, and Bronx communities, the College is committed to ensuring that BMCC’s CUNY in the Heights facility effectively serves and supports Upper Manhattan.

Accordingly, BMCC, in partnership with Bronx Community College and Hostos Community College, determined that the community voice is critical in understanding the types of programming and services that will be most beneficial. During the months of May and June 2021, two virtual town hall meetings were held. The first was delivered in partnership with national, state, and city elected officials and the second through a partnership with Community Board 12’s Youth and Education Committee. The formats of the town halls were similar with opening remarks from BMCC and its partners, an update on the facility and potential programming, and a facilitated discussion with time for questions and answers. Ms. Sofia Russo, Assistant Principal at the High School for Media and Communications facilitated the sessions in both English and Spanish1. Members of the community provided both verbal and written responses to questions that sought to understand the most pressing needs within the communities, what programming and services were most desired and needed, and what BMCC should understand about the local culture. There were nearly 80 participants between the two meetings.

Members of the BMCC team took notes during both town halls to ensure that the conversation was captured and utilized for planning purposes. In addition, participants had the opportunity to provide written comments into the chat and to respond to a survey, which contained the same three questions asked during the town halls, posted on BMCC’s CUNY in the Heights webpage. These responses were then collected, coded, and analyzed to provide common themes shared by town hall participants. The remainder of this report provides the final analysis, which resulted in the following overarching themes:

- **The Community is Counting on BMCC to Address Systemic Problems Negatively Impacting Quality of Life**
- **BMCC’s CUNY in the Heights Facility needs to Provide Educational Opportunities at Multiple Levels that Lead to Good Careers**
- **BMCC is expected to be a Committed and Involved Partner that Embraces and Reflects the Heights Culture**

1 BMCC would like to thank Congressman Adriano Espaillat, NYS Assemblymember Carmen De La Rosa, NYS Senator Robert Jackson, City Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez and Borough President Gale Brewer for partnering on the May 4th town hall. The College would also like to thank Community Board 12 Chair Elia Bueno and Youth and Education Committee Chair Fe Florimon for partnering on the June 14th town hall. Finally, the College would like to thank Ms. Sofia Russo for effectively facilitating both town hall sessions.
A theme that emerged in both town halls was that BMCC’s CUNY in the Heights facility must provide educational entry points at multiple levels to effectively serve and support the community. The initial entry point centers around preparedness and one respondent stated, “CUNY in the Heights needs to increase access to college by creating a pipeline.” This pipeline, according to the verbal and written commentary, needs to start with individuals who have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency, immigrants, and residents with limited English language skills. Flexibility in programming and services was deemed to be key as there are many single parents who would like to enter or reenter higher education, but who cannot due to busy and complex lives. There were also concerns that many individuals who would like to enter either workforce or academic programs lack the confidence or academic skills necessary to succeed. Numerous suggestions emerged around the ideas of providing tutoring and advising to non-matriculating students interested in pursuing a higher education credential. Finally, there were concerns that despite the best efforts of committed high school teachers, staff, and administrators, too many students are not prepared to succeed. One individual shared that “[we need] bridge programming to ensure successful transitioning into college.”

Income inequality is a major issue in the Heights service area and, unsurprisingly, one entry point discussed frequently was access to short-term programming connected with jobs that provide increased wages. The pandemic hit the Heights, Inwood, and Bronx communities especially hard, and respondents noted that BMCC “needs to provide short term certificate programs to get people back to work” and provide “basic trades classes that get people into jobs quickly.” More than one participant indicated that there were trade schools and for-profit colleges in the area, but that “the Heights needs access to professional trade opportunities [from] a trustworthy college.” In addition to providing the entry point into workforce training, participants would like to see BMCC play a role in addressing the unemployment and underemployment crisis. Partnerships are discussed later, but in short, there were suggestions that the BMCC CUNY in the Heights facility could help grow the number of good paying jobs and “provide a path to [these] good paying jobs.”

There was also substantial conversation about the type of academic programming that should be offered at the Washington Heights site. Respondents noted that the academic programming should be intentional in the goal of providing credentials that lead to high paying careers. Respondents continually spoke of STEM, business, and healthcare programs and suggested that the ability to take these courses uptown would help students stay enrolled. In addition, both internships and apprenticeships were discussed as ways of encouraging students, who often face significant financial burdens and carry significant financial responsibilities, to continue enrollment until they complete their degrees.

BMCC’s CUNY in the Heights is expected to be a Committed and Involved Partner that Embraces and Reflects the Heights Culture

Throughout both town halls, attendees frequently indicated how happy they were to have the opportunity to share their thoughts and how pleased they were that BMCC and its partners were providing such a forum. While not included in the official analysis, there was excitement over the fact that BMCC’s CUNY in the Heights facility was being renovated and that the community would be contributing to discussions regarding programming and services. It was also clear that the participants have elevated expectations and see tremendous potential in partnering with BMCC, and by extension Bronx and Hostos Community Colleges, and in building out partnerships throughout Upper Manhattan. There were numerous educators in attendance, and they implored BMCC to grow the relationships, not only with the local public high schools, but also with charter and private high schools. There were also numerous community-based organizations, small businesses, and local non-profits as potentially strong and influential partners. The respondents noted “there are strong and committed community-based organizations in the Heights that can be your ally” and encouraged the College to...
work with organizations who are already helping to improve the quality of life in the Heights. It was also made clear that residents are not interested in working with organizations that fail to appreciate, respect, and commit to the Heights and surrounding communities. Two sentiments that came up during the town halls and reiterate this point are “people working in CUNY in the Heights [must] care about the people” and “have to understand and be able to speak to, not at the community.”

Upper Manhattan and the Bronx are among the most diverse areas in New York City and respondents reiterated that the diversity within their communities is a strength that needs to be understood, honed, and leveraged. One respondent stated that for BMCC to be successful with its CUNY in the Heights location, it will “need to find a way to embrace the diversity that is the Heights.” Attendees also noted that the Heights continues to become more and more diverse and that, at times, this has caused issues of inclusion and equity. They are looking for BMCC to not only embrace and be a part of the diverse community that is the Heights, but to also help the community work through some of the difficulties that increased diversity brings.

Numerous respondents provided an oral history regarding the establishment and importance of the facility – including multiple references to the Hector B. Basora Attain lab. There was tremendous pride expressed throughout the town halls and one respondent noted that the College “needs to be proud of its location.” To be successful with the relaunch, participants noted that BMCC “must appreciate the history and the culture of the Heights neighborhood” and “be aligned with the [local] values.” Multiple individuals suggested that the facility can and should play a major role in the public events and celebrations unique to the surrounding area.

Finally, respondents indicated that the local culture should be embedded into the academic programming and support services offered at BMCC’s CUNY in the Heights. Educating the youth about the local culture was identified as extremely important and as a growing community need. One respondent stated that “the courses offered should provide content that educates community members about their culture.” Another stated, “class(es) should help students understand who they are and where they come from.”

Conclusion

Overall, the Colleges and our external partners felt that the town halls were successful and provided a much-needed opportunity for the community to both provide suggestions and, just as importantly, get to know a bit about BMCC. The College continues to meet with high schools, community organizations, and elected officials as it finalizes the fall 2021 programming. The information provided in the town halls will be an important addition to this work, but this will not be a one-time occurrence. BMCC commits to continuing the dialogue and providing opportunities for input moving forward. The message was loud and clear – the community is excited by the possibilities of BMCC’s CUNY in the Heights facility and expects the College to consider and address local needs, concerns, and culture. This report marks the continuation of a first, important step to effectively serve the populations who call Upper Manhattan and the surrounding communities their home.