

Redesigning Canarsie Library

Fall 2022

Brooklyn Public Library

Bklyn
Public Library

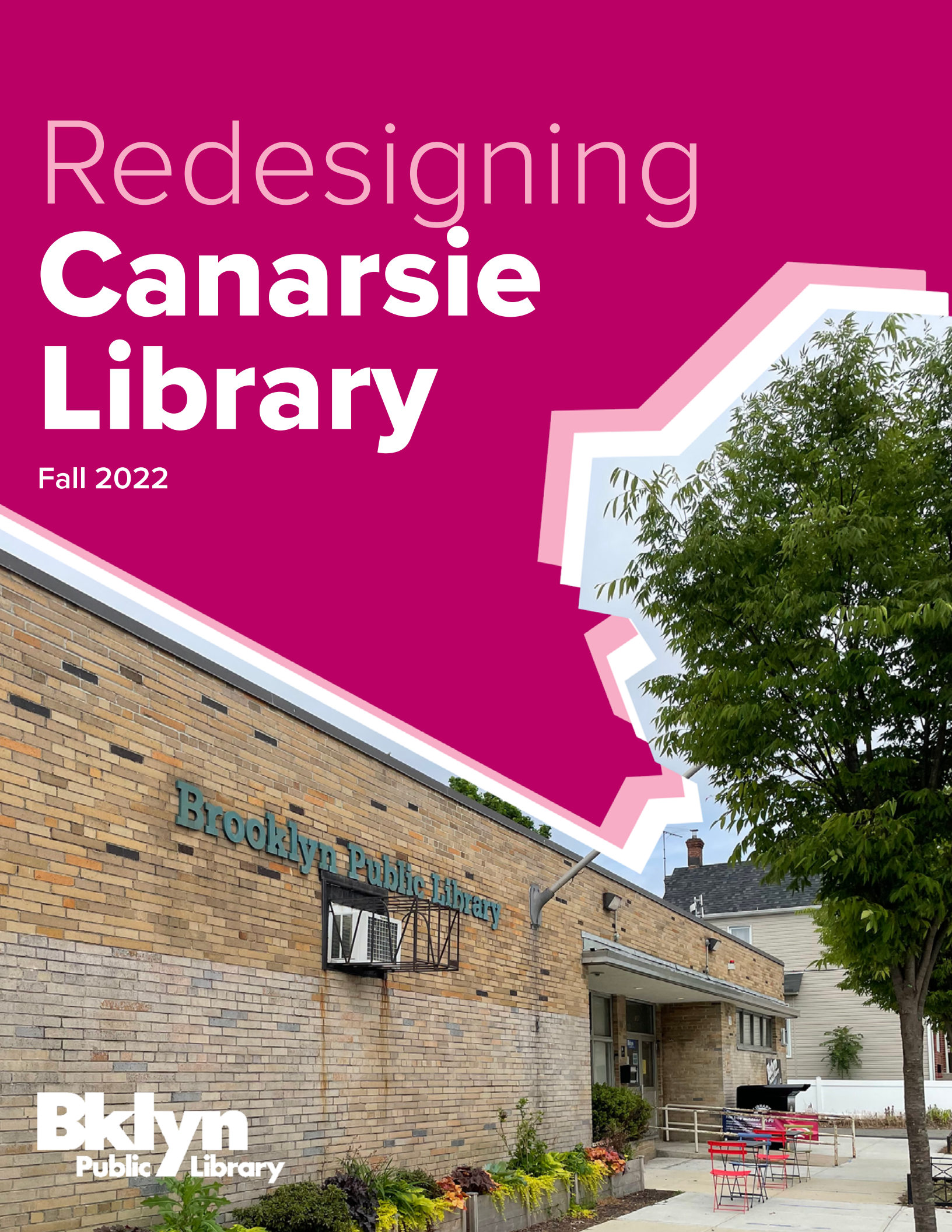


Table of Contents

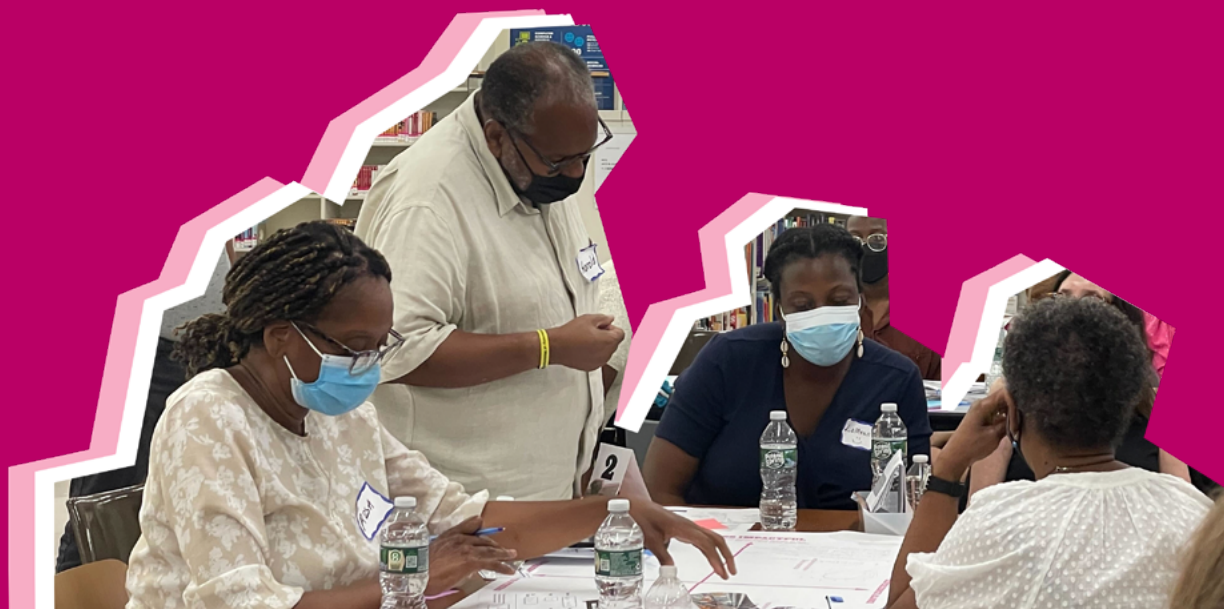
4	Executive Summary
6	Introduction
9	Neighborhood Overview
13	Community-Driven Design Process
28	Takeaways and Recommendations
39	Next Steps
40	Acknowledgments





Executive Summary

It is the mission of Brooklyn Public Library to ensure the preservation and transmission of society's knowledge, history and culture, and to provide the people of Brooklyn with free and open access to information for education, recreation and reference.



In the midst of its most significant era of rebuilding in Brooklyn Public Library's history, Brooklyn Public Library is renovating Canarsie Library to **upgrade the outdated branch and better meet the needs of the neighborhood.**



Brooklyn Public Library is a critical democratic civic institution and one of the nation's largest library systems, serving patrons in every neighborhood of the borough. Brooklyn Public Library's vision is to be a vital center of knowledge for all, accessible 24 hours a day, and will be a leader in traditional and innovative library services which reflect the diverse and dynamic spirit of the people of Brooklyn.

To ensure that the renovated branch best serves the needs of its users and stakeholder input is meaningful, inclusive and expansive, Brooklyn Public Library engaged Hester Street to lead the community engagement process, in coordination with the architects for the new design, Studio Joseph. Through a participatory design process with Canarsie residents, organizations, policymakers, service providers, and other key stakeholders, participants shared their priorities and helped to shape the program and design of the Canarsie Library renovation.

What follows is a summary of the community engagement process and the community feedback that will guide the re-design of Canarsie Library. Building a collective community-driven vision for a library that is truly reflective of the priorities and concerns of Canarsie stakeholders ensures the branch continues to be a vital neighborhood resource for generations to come.

Introduction

Brooklyn Public Library's Canarsie branch has served southeast Brooklyn since 1909, when it opened as a deposit station with a small collection of books.





Front of Canarsie Library

Photo courtesy of BPL

BPL's Canarsie Library

Since joining the Brooklyn Public Library system in 1932, Canarsie has twice moved to larger facilities in response to high demand for its services. The library has operated at its current location since 1960 and is now being renovated to allow the library to continue to support the needs of the community.

Centrally located, Canarsie Library is in close proximity to several community institutions including the Four Seasons Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, the former Canarsie High School (now three separate schools - the Urban Action Academy, the High School for Innovation in Advertising and Media, and the High School for Medical Professions), and Holy Family and Beraca churches.

Brooklyn Public Library has \$20 million dollars in funding for this renovation from the City of New York, including funds from local Councilmember Mercedes Narcisse and City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams. The renovation provides an opportunity to reshape this branch for the patrons who rely on it now and for future generations.



Community engagement over the summer and fall of 2022 was led by Hester Street and planned in coordination with library staff and the architects leading the renovation, Studio Joseph. The process provided opportunities for community stakeholders of all ages and backgrounds to contribute ideas and feedback about the programs and services they rely on, and physical improvements they would like to see in the new library. This input will directly inform conversations between Brooklyn Public Library and Studio Joseph as they work to incorporate the community's vision into plans for the renovated library.

Neighborhood Overview
**Today, Canarsie has
a population of about
87,000 residents and is
home to a vibrant West
Indian community.**





Canarsie Pier, 1953

Photo courtesy of BPL

Named for the indigenous Canarsee people,¹ Canarsie was developed in the mid 20th century as a largely Italian and Jewish suburb and became a Black majority neighborhood in the late 1990s.² Today, Canarsie has a population of about 87,000 residents and is home to a vibrant West Indian community.³ Canarsie is included in Community Board 18 and represented by the 42nd and 46th New York Community Council districts.

Bounded by the Paerdegat Basin, Fresh Creek, and Jamaica Bay, Canarsie is a residential community with an extensive park network and a history of modern waterfront activity including amusement parks, yacht clubs, restaurants and hotels. Canarsie Pier, a popular fishing and recreational area, became the first urban national park in the country after its incorporation into the National Park Services' Gateway National Recreation Area.

¹ UrbanAreas. "[A Brief History of Canarsie.](#)" Accessed November 2, 2022.

² Brooklyn Public Library. "[Black Canarsie: A History.](#)" Accessed November 2, 2022.

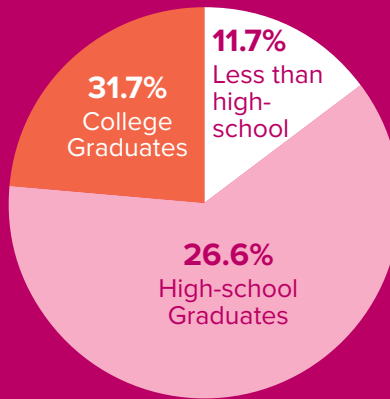
³ U.S. Census Bureau; [American Community Survey, 2016-2020 ACS Database, Table Brooklyn: Canarsie \[BK1803\]](#); generated by NYC Department of City Planning; using ACS Data Tables. Accessed November 1, 2022.

In the Canarsie Neighborhood:

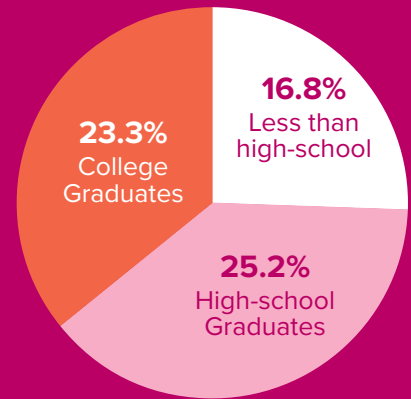
45%
are foreign born
35.6% borough-wide

9.2%
have limited
English proficiency
13.9% borough-wide

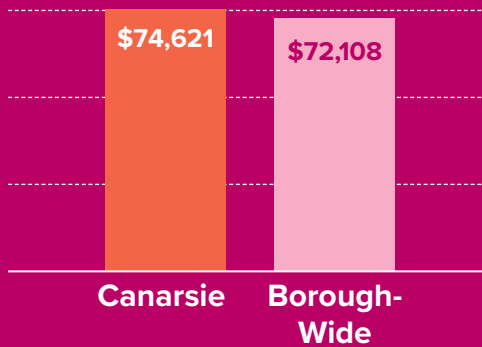
Educational Attainment In Canarsie



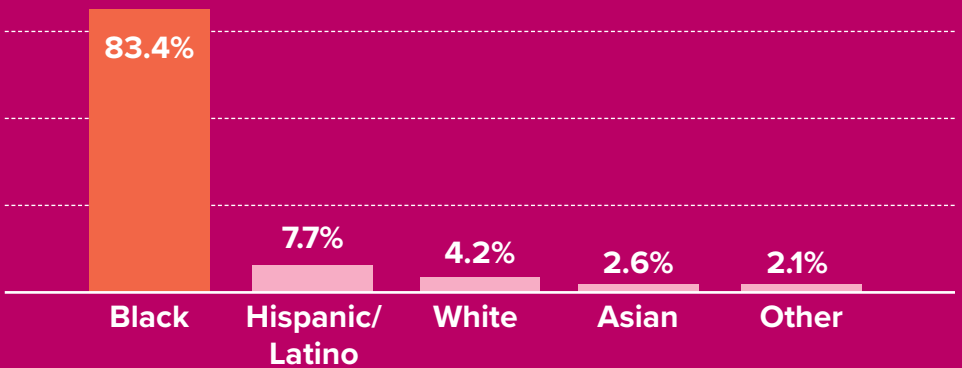
Borough-wide



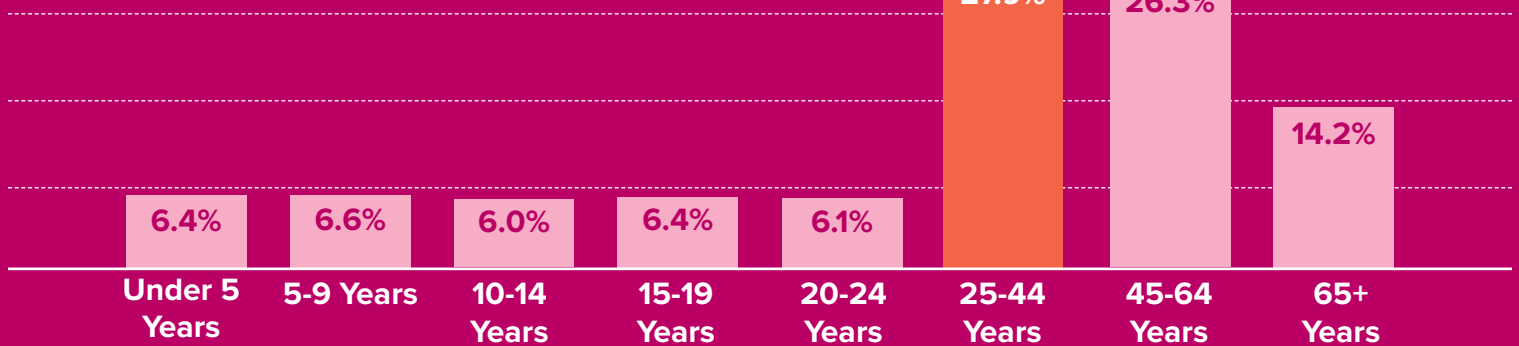
Median Household Income

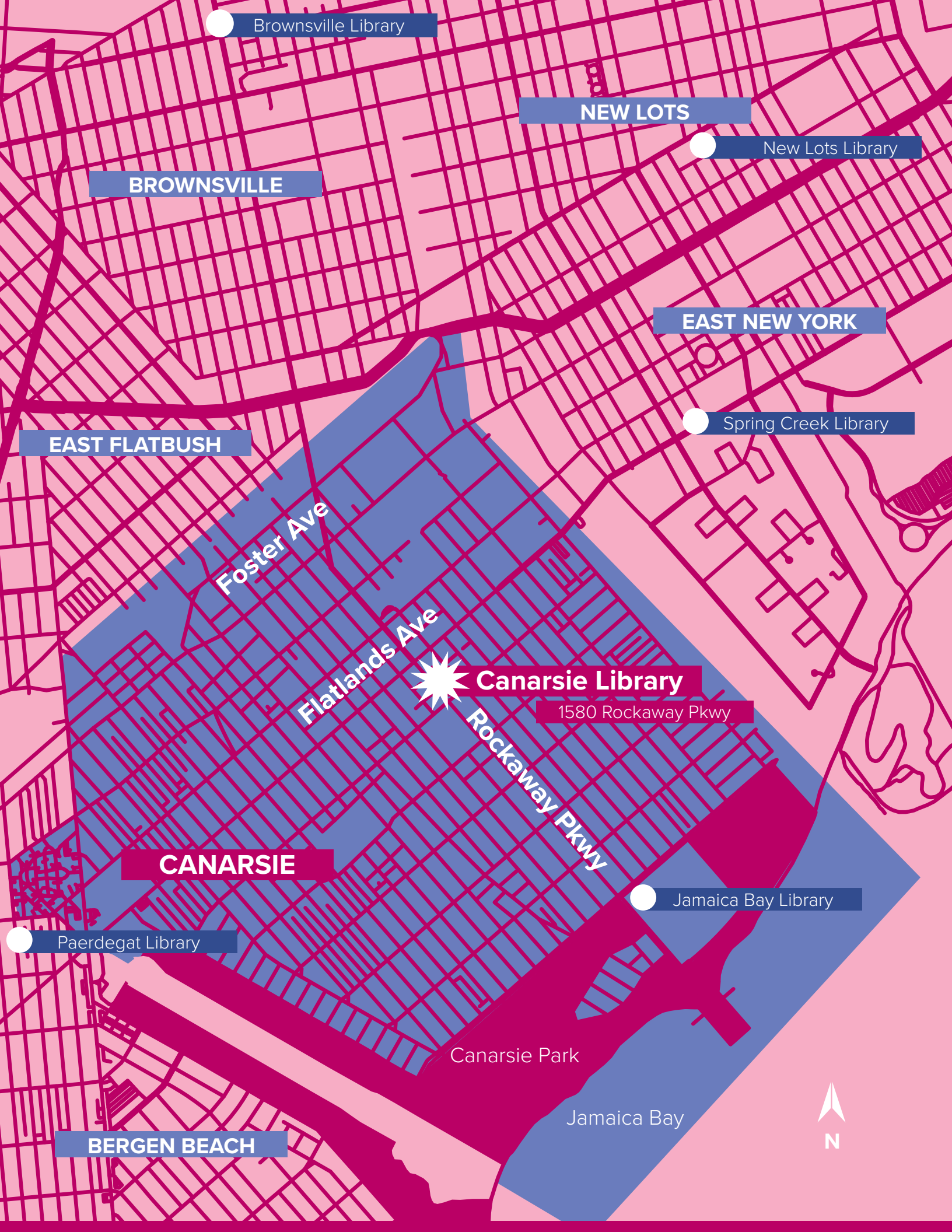


Race + Ethnicity



Age Distribution





Brownsville Library

NEW LOTS

New Lots Library

BROWNSVILLE

EAST NEW YORK

EAST FLATBUSH

Spring Creek Library

Foster Ave

Flatlands Ave

Canarsie Library

1580 Rockaway Pkwy

Rockaway Pkwy

CANARSIE

Jamaica Bay Library

Paerdegat Library

Canarsie Park

Jamaica Bay

BERGEN BEACH



Process

A community-driven design process that honors + centers lived experiences.



Goals: A Meaningful, Inclusive + Expansive Process



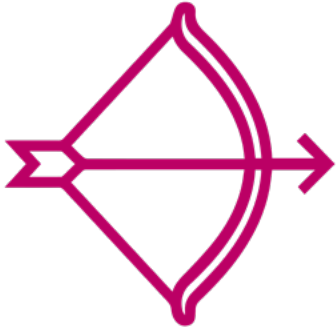
A community-driven design process ensures that resident engagement is meaningful, inclusive and expansive, resulting in a new library that is truly reflective of the priorities and concerns of Canarsie stakeholders. With this in mind, Brooklyn Public Library partnered with Hester Street to develop a process that aimed to:

Strengthen relationships between Canarsie Library and its stakeholders

Gather meaningful input to inform building and programmatic needs for the library renovation

Synthesize and document engagement findings to inform future design and programming decisions

Principles: How Did We Achieve Our Goals?



Our work was guided by the following principles to ensure inclusive and expansive engagement that would result in clear recommendations about space, programs and features:

Creation and use of easily available graphic and visual tools for a variety of audiences

Transparency about project parameters, timeline, and opportunities for feedback

Creation of opportunities for stakeholders to adjust and affirm feedback throughout the engagement process

Building relationships with diverse local partners to ensure engagement reflects the community

Research + Discovery

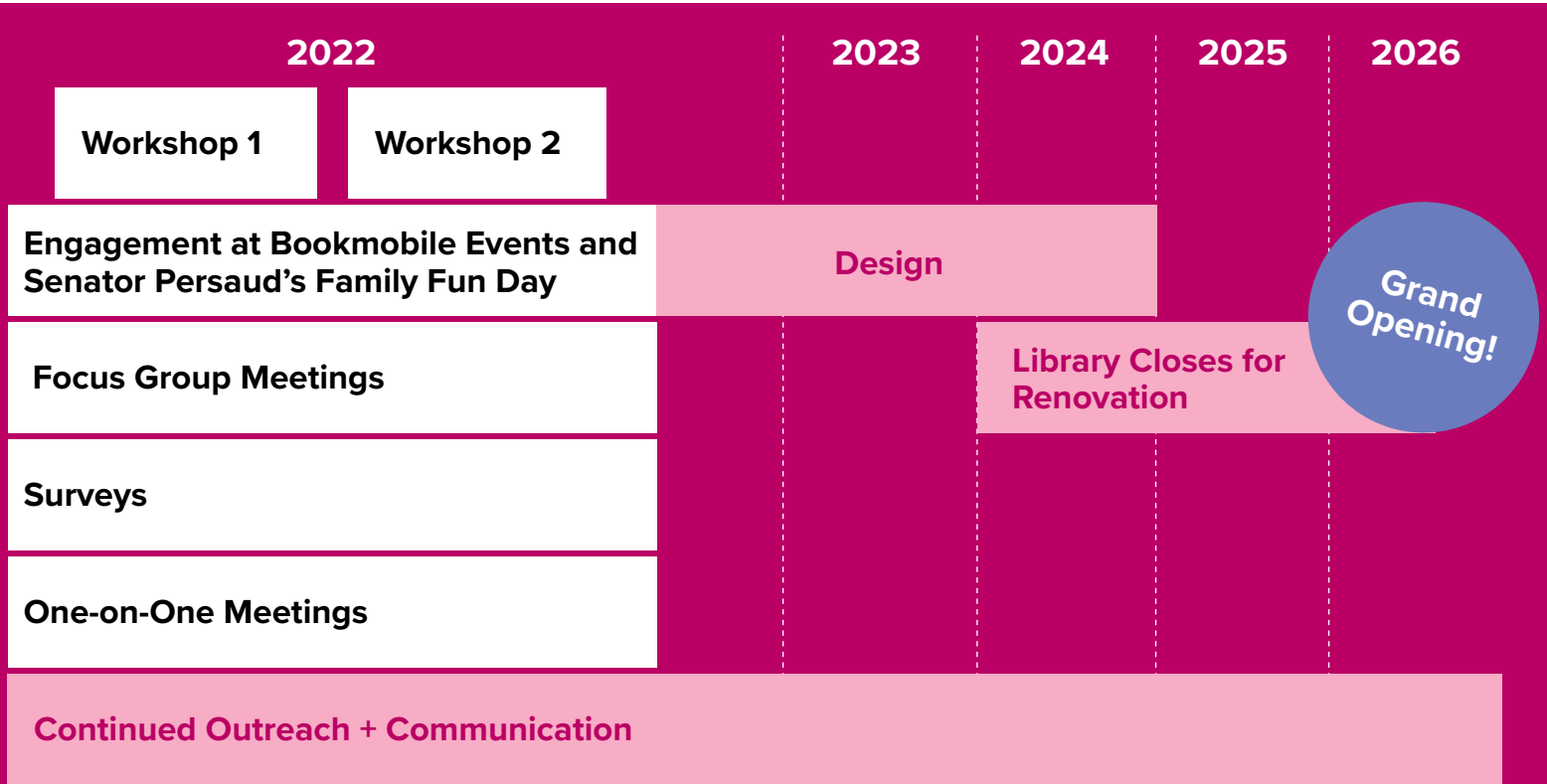


Next, Hester Street worked to understand the neighborhood context and the relationships between the library and local organizations, service providers and local elected representatives. We identified neighborhood assets - schools, community-based organizations, community and senior centers - and worked with Brooklyn Public Library to identify local partners who could help support outreach and focus groups while also providing feedback on Canarsie Library's renovation. Additionally, we toured the branch with library staff to better understand the current library's constraints and to gain programmatic and spatial insights from those who know the library best.

Beginning in Spring 2022, through one-on-one meetings, focus groups, tabling at Bookmobile events, workshops and surveys, we gathered feedback from over 280 people to ensure the library is reflective of the neighborhood's diverse needs.

We spoke with elected representatives, community boards, schools and community-based organizations to introduce (or reintroduce) the community to Canarsie Library and the upcoming renovation, learn more about their needs, and discuss their vision and ideas for upgrading the branch. Engagement workshops were held in person at the library to meet a diverse group of community members in the space that needed their input. Particular attention was paid to understanding how COVID-19 impacted the Canarsie community and identifying challenges as well as opportunities for the library to better serve its patrons.

Timeline



Who We've Engaged

Brooklyn Public Library Partners

BPL Bookmobile
 Canarsie Library Staff
 Capital Planning and Facilities Management
 Government and Community Relations
 Marketing and Communications
 Youth and Family Services

Community-Based Organizations

Breukelen Houses
 Canarsie Alliance
 Canarsie Community Development
 Canarsie Courier Newspaper
 Community Board 18

Elected Representatives

Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso
 Councilmember Mercedes Narcisse
 Senator Roxanne Persaud
 Assemblymember Jaime Williams

Schools

Canarsie High School for Medical Professions
 Canarsie High School - Urban Action Academy
 Science and Medicine Middle School 366

....and over 100 neighbors and neighborhood leaders!

Engagement by the Numbers

2

Community Workshops

4

Bookmobile Events

11

Stakeholder Interviews

95

Surveys

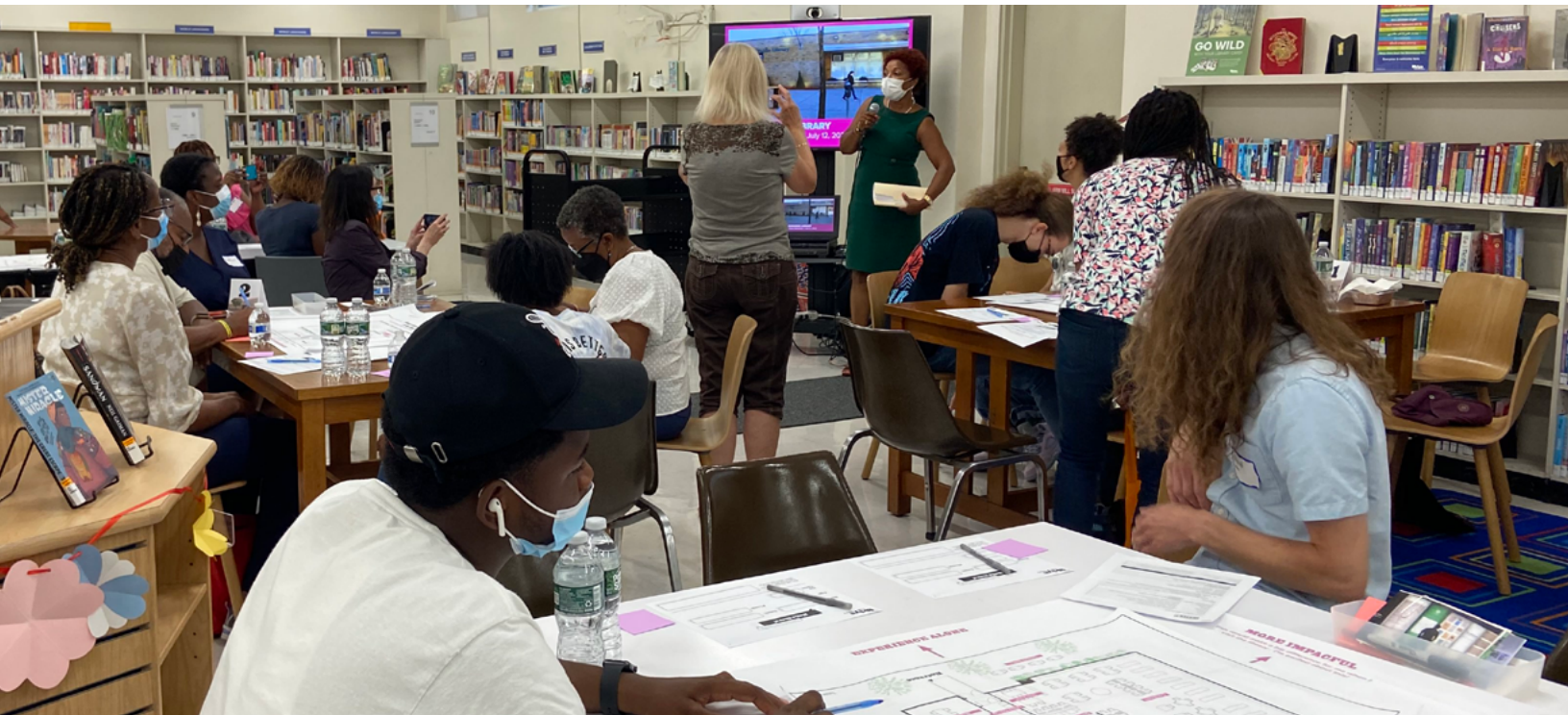
Community Workshops

Community-driven in-person workshops helped broaden our reach to the Canarsie community and were a significant portion of the participatory design process. In each workshop, participants shared their priorities and helped shape the programs and design of the Canarsie Library renovation. After each workshop, feedback was synthesized and engagement findings were documented to inform future design and programming decisions.

Workshop #1

Workshop #1 focused on **understanding how stakeholders and library patrons currently use the library space, the needs, wants and concerns of library patrons, and identifying opportunities and ideas for spatial and programmatic improvements to Canarsie Library.**

This workshop also provided an opportunity to identify how the pandemic has changed the ways people want to use community spaces. An additional goal of Workshop #1 was to increase the community's awareness of Canarsie Library.

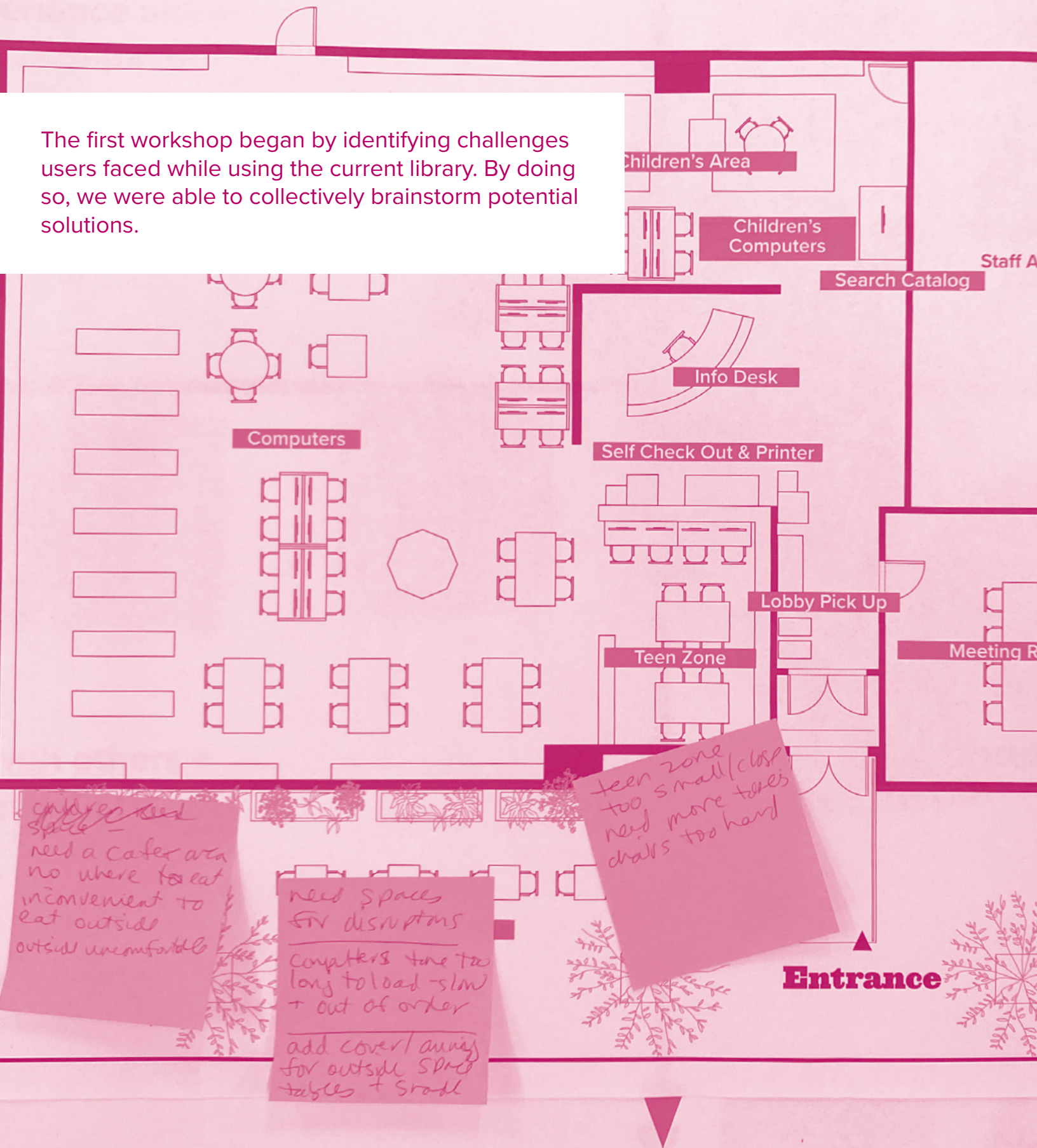


Councilmember Narcisse addresses participants at Community Workshop #1.

What's currently not working in the library space?

Look around the the library! What are some challenges you face while using the

The first workshop began by identifying challenges users faced while using the current library. By doing so, we were able to collectively brainstorm potential solutions.



EXPERIENCE ALONE



In the first workshop, participants also placed precedent images and activities along a spectrum that indicated community impact, as well as what library patrons wanted to experience alone versus with others.

EXPERIENCE WITH OTHERS

Workshop #2

Continuing to build excitement about the Canarsie Library renovation, Workshop #2 was informed by the previous engagement and gave the community an opportunity to provide further clarity on how they wanted to use the outdoor and community spaces.

Together with more than 30 adults, seniors and teens, workshop activities generated discussions that envisioned a renovated outdoor space and community space, as well as gathered deeper feedback on how existing library resources, book browsing and technology use could be improved.



Representative from Senator Persaud's office participates in Workshop #2.

In the second workshop, participants used their senses to imagine what the outdoor and community spaces will be like in the renovated library. Participants described what they imagined their future selves hearing, seeing, doing and using while at Canarsie Library.

Outdoor Space in Your Renovated Library

When are you doing this?

Who are you doing this with?

What do you hear?

What do you see?

What

How do you access this?

Taking a lunch break

Playing board games

Playing or learning music

Canarsie Library Renovation - Community Workshop

Surveys

In an effort to reach as many community members as possible, digital and printed surveys were posted on the library website and distributed at the library, engagements and other community events to gather meaningful patron input.

Surveys allowed community members to share **how they use Canarsie Library services and their future ideas for the renovated library.**

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Canarsie Library Renovation Survey

Brooklyn Public Library will be renovating Canarsie Library to better serve and support you. We want to learn more about how you use the library and how we might improve it!

This survey is for internal purposes only and the data we collect will be used to inform and shape the services and spaces we provide.

Thank you for your time!

Part 1: Using the Library

1. Are you a library card holder?

- Yes
- No

2. Which branch is closest to where you live?

- BPL, Walt Whitman
(Near Fort Greene Park)
- BPL, Canarsie
(Rockaway Pkwy + Ave J)
- BPL, New Lots

3. Which branch do you visit most often?

- BPL, Walt Whitman
(Near Fort Greene Park)
- BPL, Canarsie
(Rockaway Pkwy + Ave J)
- BPL, New Lots

4. How often do/would you (and your family) typically visit the library?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly

5. How do you primarily find out about library events and programs?

(Select all that apply)

- Library website
- Email or news blasts
- Social media

5. When you visit the library, what do you typically do?

(Select all that apply)

- Check out books, movies, toys, and periodicals
- Attend programs, classes, and events
- Access computers and technology
- Access resources and services
- Individual work
- Group work
- Research
- Socialize
- Other: _____

6. The library will be undergoing a renovation. When redesigning the library, what types of programs, services and spaces do you think are the most important to include?

(Select your top 5 choices)

- Books
- Wi-fi access
- Computers and technology
- Classrooms and meeting rooms
- Quiet work space
- Hang out space
- Teens' space
- Children's space
- Programs and classes
- Homework/tutoring help

Example of the Canarsie Renovation Survey

Bookmobile Events

Bookmobile events allowed library patrons and community members the opportunity to contribute their community vision to plans for the renovated library in a familiar, outdoor environment.

Each week in July, Brooklyn Public Library Staff, Hester Street and the Brooklyn Public Library Bookmobile Team met the community in Canarsie Park, in front of Canarsie Library, and at Breukelen Houses to help patrons check-out books, distribute informational materials, collect surveys and participate in less formal conversations and engagement activities around their priorities for the library renovation.



Community members filling out the renovation survey at a Bookmobile Event.

Outreach Kit

An engagement outreach kit was developed to assist Brooklyn Public Library in continuing the community feedback loop throughout the design and construction process.

Colorful and whimsical, the outreach kit contains posters, banners, social media templates and website text that outlines the community engagement process, summarizes findings and provides a project timeline. It presents helpful information to library patrons and serves as a tool to further deepen the branch's community connections.

Canarsie Library Is Being Renovated!

Brooklyn Public Library is renovating Canarsie Library to better meet the needs of the neighborhood.

To ensure that the renovated branch best serves the needs of its users, in Summer and Fall of 2022, the library engaged over 280 stakeholders including community members, organizations, schools, and elected representatives in a participatory design process. Participants shared their priorities and helped to shape the program and design of the Canarsie renovation.

Hester Street collected what we heard and analyzed community recommendations for space, features, and programs in the renovated library.

Want to see the full list? Visit bklynlib.org/canarsie or scan this QR code!

Timeline:

- 2022: Design
- 2023: Library Closed for Renovation
- 2024: Design
- 2025: Library Closed for Renovation
- 2026: Grand Opening!

Community Updates

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A banner designed to provide updates on the library renovation.

In the Renovated Canarsie Library, Community Members Want to See:

More natural light, nature, and plants inside

Individual spaces

Community and workshop spaces

A second floor to enhance neighborhood presence and add space

Improved bathrooms and water fountains

Varied, movable, and multipurpose furniture

Indoor and outdoor movie nights

Expanded book collection with local authors and culturally responsive books

Colorful spaces

An expanded children's area

Enhanced ADA accessibility

Material and stroller storage

A dedicated teen space

Music classes

An outdoor space with a community garden, reading areas, and furniture

More programs:

- More weekend & family programs
- ESL, tutoring, & literacy classes
- Financial literacy classes
- Storytime
- Tech classes
- Physical & mental health programs

More charging stations

More computer, printing, and technology access

Displays, art, and events about local history and culture

Clear sightlines

Solar power, flood protection, and back-up generators

Bklyn Public Library

HESTER ST

Takeaways and Recommendations





Participant feedback was collected, analyzed and synthesized and shared with Studio Joseph and Brooklyn Public Library.

The following are the takeaways and recommendations that highlight the community's priority areas throughout the engagement process.

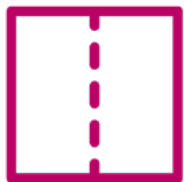
Designated
Spaces

Accessible
Features

Community-driven
Programming

Designated Spaces

Currently, a majority of the library's usage occurs within one open space. Patrons browse library stacks, use computers, engage with library staff at the information desk and use the space for personal work all within a tight footprint. Children have a small area for themselves. There is also currently one meeting room that has been used for community meetings. **Participants collectively emphasized that different spaces should accommodate different needs.**



Separate spaces for specific program/function uses to address a variety of needs and acoustic concerns. Should include community, individual and workshop spaces



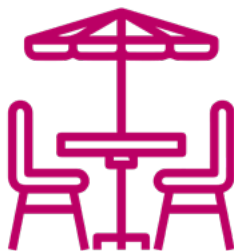
Create a large children's area with computers, interactive technology/elements, clear sight lines and sound buffering, establishing areas for distinct age groups



Create a separate space for teens that they can claim as their own



Provide a designated area for stroller parking and **additional storage space** for library materials



Enhance the outdoor space by adding a community garden, reading areas, furniture, ability to provide relief from weather elements and providing access through the library



Add a second floor to enhance neighborhood presence and augment existing square footage

“I would like to see **more rooms** so people can choose the space they want to be in.”

Community Member

“We are strapped for good public spaces in Canarsie, the **library can fill that gap.**”

Floyd Jarvis, Canarsie Alliance



COMMUNITY
PARTNER

Accessible Features

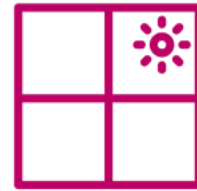
We asked patrons what features they want to see in the new library. Some ideas included more technology, incorporating local history and culture in the space and the book collection, and more natural light.



Enhance ADA accessibility



Incorporate local history and culture through art, displays and events



Incorporate more natural light, nature and plants



Expand computer, printing, and technology access accompanied by more charging stations



Include varied, movable, and multipurpose furniture for both relaxing and working



Increase book collection to include more books that are culturally responsive and draws from local authors



Improve bathroom facilities and add new facilities including **drinking water fountains, sinks in activity rooms** and **the ability to hold cooking classes**



Add sustainable and resilient building systems that can respond to climate change and natural disasters such as solar power, flood protection and back-up generators



Create colorful interior and exterior spaces that are soothing, comforting and culturally reflective of the community



“It would be nice to have a space to learn about the community for people new to Canarsie.”
Linda Steinmuller, Canarsie Courier

“The design of the library should be culturally reflective of the community.”
Senator Roxanne Persaud

Community-driven Programming

Programs are an important part of the library experience for patrons. Community members shared their desire for more ESL classes, art and culture-related programming and opportunities to learn about the neighborhood's history.



Increase beloved program offerings such as **weekend and family programming, storytime, ESL classes and tutoring and literacy classes**



Expand community programming to include **technology and music classes, career readiness, financial literacy, and mental and physical wellness**



Host indoor and outdoor movie nights that could feature local filmmakers



Showcase community history through cultural programs and library materials

“I love that it **serves the community no matter what**, and that it has more than books available.”

Community Member

How do you currently use your library?

Where do you spend most of your time at Canarsie Library?

Place a dot that corresponds with your age group on the floor plan in the spaces you use the most, and let us know why!



“The library is a place for community organizations to **spread information** - and most of these organizations don't have their own office, so the library can help.”

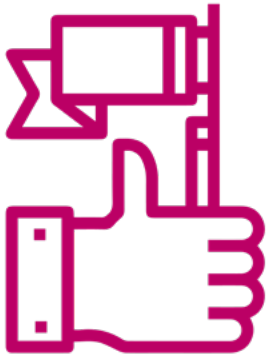
Ms. King, Tenant's Association at Breukelen Houses

Lessons Learned

Opportunities and Challenges



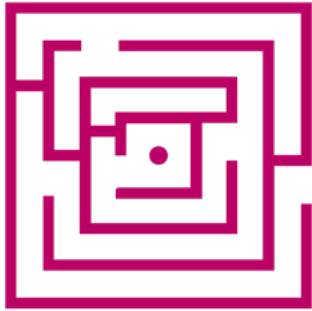
Opportunities



Participation in the various engagement activities reflected input from regular Canarsie patrons as well as others less familiar with the branch. Food, snacks and refreshments were provided for in-person engagements, and participants were met warmly and enthusiastically by beloved library staff to not only affirm that the process was rooted in respect and community, but also celebrate joyful collective in-person visioning after being apart during the pandemic. Additionally, surveys were administered in both digital and analog formats to ensure people unable to attend the engagements could participate.

Engagement activities and materials were colorful, well-designed and appealed to participants of all ages and backgrounds. They invited people to participate in modes most comfortable to them. Participants could provide written or verbal feedback, as well as illustrate their ideas using art supplies. Additionally, the wide range of engagement activities were designed to allow people to provide their input regardless of how much time they were able to give. Less time-intensive activities included filling out a bookmark with a prompt in less than a minute, while interactive poster boards allowed other participants to dive into longer, more substantive conversations.

Challenges



Overall, the engagement process was a success, but we faced a few challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to shape people’s comfort levels with gathering indoors. Taking this into consideration, 4 in-person outdoor Bookmobile events were able to be held in addition to the 2 indoor workshops. The Bookmobile events were designed as day-long engagement opportunities and allowed us to gather input from teens and kids since engagement was conducted over summer months and school was closed.

Next Steps

Looking Ahead

Working with Brooklyn Public Library, Studio Joseph will continue the architectural design of the library and ensure that recommendations and findings from this inclusive community-driven process guide the future renovation of Canarsie Library. When the design is complete, it will be shared with the community.

Canarsie Library is an indispensable community resource that will gain increased neighborhood visibility through this renovation. Encouraging the community to help design a space that is inviting, supportive and celebrates the unique contributions and identities of the Canarsie community, will ensure that the branch continues to be a vital civic space to learn, gather and celebrate for generations to come.



Acknowledgements

A Big Thanks

This process would not have been possible without the active participation of Canarsie Library patrons who joined us for engagement workshops and conversations to share their ideas and vision for a renovated space. We would also like to acknowledge the support of Community-Based Organizations, elected representatives, public schools, Canarsie Library and Brooklyn Public Library staff members who dedicated their time and contributed their brilliance, knowledge, creativity and insights to help guide a community-driven process.



EXPERIENCE ALONE



HESTER ST

Report by: Andrew Harris
 Kami Beckford
 Kristen Chin
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