

URBAN FELLOWS NEWSLETTER



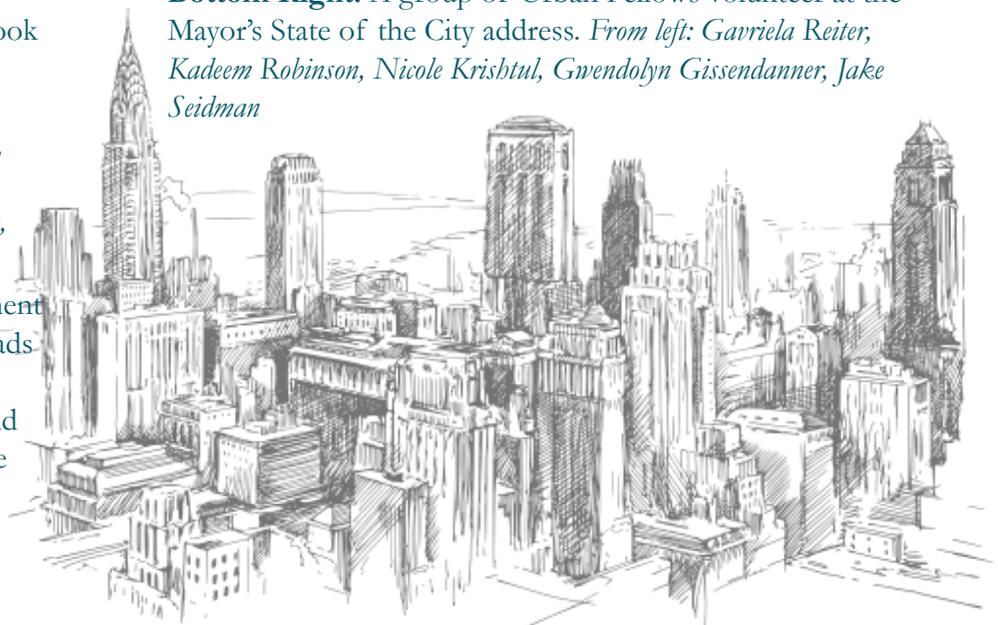
Top Left: Urban Fellows spend a Saturday turning compost at Red Hook Community Farms.

Top Row, from left: Belen Flores, Lydia Ghuman, Gabriela Reiter, Martha Isaacs, Katie Fallon, Jake Seidman

Top Right: Martha Isaacs, Department of Transportation Urban Fellow, heads into the field.

Bottom Left: Kadeem Robinson and other Urban Fellows volunteer at the New York City Marathon.

Bottom Right: A group of Urban Fellows volunteer at the Mayor's State of the City address. *From left: Gabriela Reiter, Kadeem Robinson, Nicole Krishtul, Gwendolyn Gissendanner, Jake Seidman*



Alumni Spotlight

Elijah Hutchinson, Urban Fellow Class of '08, is the Vice Presidents of Waterfronts for the Development department within with Division of Planning, Development, and Port & Transportation at the New York City Economic Development Corporation. Elijah's work focuses on facilitating long-term planning and redevelopment projects on New York City's waterfront with infrastructure, open space, and mix-used developments. Current project highlights include Lower Manhattan Coastal Resiliency, Brooklyn Piers, Manhattan Waterfront Greenway, and the Lower Concourse \$200M Infrastructure Investment Initiative. Elijah holds a Master's degree in City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a Bachelor's degree from Harvard College.



**ELIJAH
HUTCHINSON**



**ANNIE
COLARUSSO**

Annie Colarusso, Urban Fellow Class of '16, is a Policy Analyst for New York's Deputy Mayor for Operations, where she liaises with the City's operating agencies and coordinates special projects. Most recently, Annie oversaw the development and publication of "LeadFreeNYC: A Roadmap to Eliminating Childhood Lead Poisoning" – a comprehensive plan that outlines new and cross-cutting initiatives to protect the public health of New York City's most vulnerable populations. Prior to joining the City as an Urban Fellow, Annie conducted municipal environmental governance research with a Fulbright Fellowship in the Netherlands and earned an Environment and Resource Management Research Master's from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. She holds a Bachelor's degree in History from Tulane University.

What agency were you placed in as a fellow?

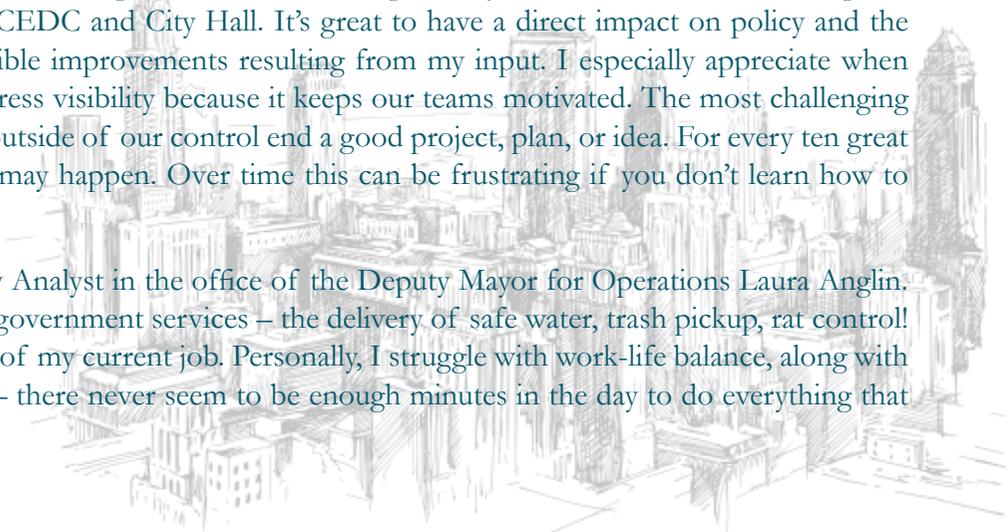
Elijah Hutchinson [EH]: I was placed at the New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) Department for Development.

Annie Colarusso[AC]: I was placed in the Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resiliency (ORR).

What is the most exciting aspect of your current job? What is the most challenging?

EH: The most exciting aspect of working at NYCEDC is being directly involved in decision-making and advising leadership at both NYCEDC and City Hall. It's great to have a direct impact on policy and the built environment and see tangible improvements resulting from my input. I especially appreciate when one of my projects gets good press visibility because it keeps our teams motivated. The most challenging aspect is when politics that are outside of our control end a good project, plan, or idea. For every ten great things we plan to do, only one may happen. Over time this can be frustrating if you don't learn how to reposition your work.

AC: I currently work as a Policy Analyst in the office of the Deputy Mayor for Operations Laura Anglin. I find working to improve core government services – the delivery of safe water, trash pickup, rat control! – to be the most exciting aspect of my current job. Personally, I struggle with work-life balance, along with managing competing priorities – there never seem to be enough minutes in the day to do everything that needs to get done.



Alumni Spotlight

Question & Answer

What was the most rewarding experience you had as a fellow? Most challenging?

EH: My most rewarding experience was developing my network of friends and colleagues who shared a passion for public service in New York City, often leading to life-long friendships and professional connections. I appreciated the site visits, Wednesday seminar sessions, and thoughtful conversations with my peers as we all tried to understand the inner workings of city government. My most challenging experience was observing organizational dysfunction without understanding the core reasons behind it and without having the resources to address it. These feelings eventually inspired me to go to graduate school to study urban policy and planning and also fed my secret desire to one day fix NYCHA to best serve its residents and community.

AC: At ORR, I started an internal newsletter called “Defining Equity,” through which I explored various definitions of equity and how these function in discussions around climate justice, in academia, and in the City’s published commitments in the Mayor’s Management Report and OneNYC. Equity was a hot topic at ORR during my fellowship, mainly in terms of how it guides the Mayor’s vision and how our office should integrate it into everyday decisions. I found the process of publishing a newsletter very rewarding, and I also gained some Photoshop and web layout skills. As for challenges, I struggled for the first few months to define my role as a fellow and what it meant to be a “value add” in my placement.

What are the benefits of working in city government?

EH: In my work at EDC, there’s room for using creativity to solve technical and adaptive challenges in the City. I appreciate that we are nimble and responsive to the needs of the City, its people, and its politicians. At the City level I’m able to directly connect with communities, while also having access to the significant policy and financial resources that the City commands.

AC: My position and team give me an unparalleled platform from which to explore, pitch, and develop policy proposals with City agencies that have a direct impact on New Yorkers’ everyday lives.

How has your Urban Fellows experience shaped the career you have today?

EH: Being a fellow helped me understand the importance of advocating for my interests, taking professional risks, and taking the initiative when possible. At NYCHA I had the chance to get involved in just about everything I wanted to stick my nose into, including selection of developers for NYCHA property dispositions and in-fill development projects, homeownership policy and program development, and capital construction. I came in with what I thought was an interest in housing development and realized through the fellowship and graduate school that I had actually more of an interest in community planning and economic development.

AC: I’m captivated by Benjamin Barber’s question: What if Mayors Ruled the World? Looking for the answer to that question is actually what led me to the Urban Fellows – I applied to the program due to my interest in municipal government from an international angle.

If you could give one piece of advice to the current cohort what would it be?

EH: Workforces and technological developments are changing so fast that chances are the job you’ll want in five years doesn’t yet exist today. So when you’re considering your future, take solace in that: do what you love doing right now, and do it well. You’ll make a great contribution no matter what professional path you take.

AC: Being a fellow is a magical time to be a student of New York City government – ideally, your placement encourages learning in addition to fulfilling your role on your team. So ask questions, attend meetings, and ask people to coffee!

Agency Spotlight

Department of Transportation

By: Martha Isaacs

New York City's Department of Transportation (DOT) seeks to move pedestrian and vehicular traffic safely, reduce traffic congestion, encourage the use of mass transit, and maintain the city's streets, bridges, sidewalks, highways, and tunnels. DOT has nearly 6,000 employees who manage these assets and build better bicycle infrastructure, bus lanes, and public spaces designed to put people first.

DOT houses several divisions that work on various aspects of the Department's responsibilities, such as improving traffic safety around school zones, creating resiliency plans for streets and bridges in the face of climate change, and increasing bus speeds through better road and signaling design. There are also five Borough Commissioners who focus on DOT projects at the borough level, including safety improvements and streetscape renovations in specific neighborhoods. The agency also promotes cross-division collaboration on large scale projects such as Vision Zero, a multi-agency plan to eliminate deaths from traffic crashes.

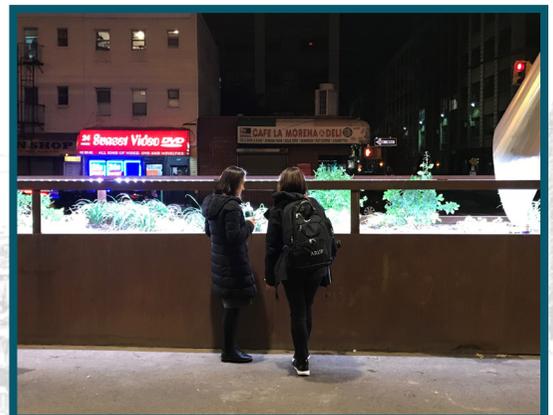
As an Urban Fellow in the Urban Design + Art + Wayfinding unit at DOT, I work on several projects related to improving NYC's built environment for pedestrians. One of my main goals involves evaluating WalkNYC, NYC's system of map signs installed on sidewalks to help pedestrians navigate throughout the city. To gather more data about the effectiveness of this system, I have organized an evaluation study that measures utilization rate of the signs as well as user feedback from online and in-person surveying. Throughout this evaluation process, I hope to identify ways in which WalkNYC signs can become more useful to New Yorkers and tourists and empower them to walk and take transit throughout the city regardless of their language proficiency or physical/cognitive ability.

I also work on urban design projects as part of DOT's "El-Space" program. NYC has approximately 300 linear miles of this space, which is the area beneath and adjacent to elevated transportation infrastructure (including above-ground subways, bridges, and highways). In partnership with the Design Trust for Public Space, DOT is studying and testing new El-Space treatments to improve access, mobility, safety, and connectivity. With green infrastructure, improved lighting, seating, and programming, these El-Spaces can become assets to improve neighborhood cohesion. The NYC Center for Architecture is featuring the El-Space program in its "Design and the Just City in NYC" exhibit, on view until March 30, 2019.

As an aspiring urban planner who focuses on the intersection between physical infrastructure and social mobility, I find DOT to be a prime learning lab to understand the complex partnerships necessary to implement design projects in NYC. For every sign or sidewalk we install, we must work with Business Improvement Districts, community boards, and other government agencies to obtain necessary permissions and approvals. In a changing transportation ecosystem – with dockless bikeshare, autonomous vehicles, and transit improvements all in development – it is crucial to ensure that streetscapes prioritize pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.



During my observations of WalkNYC signs, I record the percentage of passing pedestrians that utilize signs at different locations and time periods.



The Urban Design team evaluated the lighting of El-Space pilot project as part of efforts to determine best practices for improvements and place making.

Seminar Overview

Every week the Urban Fellows meet for a seminar that features everything from meaningful conversations with high-level City officials to interactive workshops and site visits.

Past sessions include: a walking tour of Union Square led by Urban Fellow alum, onetime program director, and former Commissioner of Small Business Services Robert Walsh; a discussion on community development with Michelle de la Uz, Urban Fellow alum, City Planning Commissioner, and Director of the Fifth Avenue Committee; a seminar about the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs' work on behalf of the City's immigrants with Sonia Lin, the office's General Counsel and Policy Director; and a visit to the United Nations to learn from Commissioner Penny Abeywardena of the Mayor's Office of International Affairs.

Reflections on the Intergenerational Dynamics Training

On December 6th, the cohort participated in an Intergenerational Dynamics Training with members of the NYC Leadership Institute, a program for a select group of mid-level City agency executives that prepares them to lead organizational change at their agencies. With the help of the renowned World Café methodology, Urban Fellows and Leadership Institute enrollees discussed how to deal with the dynamics and challenges that arise from generational differences in the workplace. Below are reflections on the training from a Leadership Institute member and an Urban Fellow.



Maggie Raife
Housing Preservation & Development
*Director of Business Intelligence
& Data Innovation*

Christa Alexander
Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
Urban Fellow



What does the term intergenerational dynamics mean to you?

How has your interpretation of this term changed since the workshop?

Maggie Raife [MR]: The workshop helped me think about how different generations may have different frames of reference that play out in workplace communication and other dynamics. For example, early in the workshop we talked about cultural forces that shaped our lives growing up: a number of Urban Fellows talked about social media, others talked about the 1990s' culture of optimism, and still others talked about the nuclear threat of the Cold War. All of our identities are multi-faceted, but I think age and generation are important facets we may sometimes overlook.

Christa Alexander [CA]: Understanding intergenerational dynamics means being mindful of the different walks of life that people come from and learning how to manage those differences in different spaces. After the workshop, I started to view the term "intergenerational" as more relative to a person's experiences and personal journey rather than just a configuration of age.

How do you see intergenerational dynamics come into play at your agency or in city government in general?

[MR]: In my experience, New York City government contains a diverse group of employees who span many generations. It's one of the great parts about working for the City. But as with any workplace, age-based assumptions or stereotypes can sometimes impede office communications.

[CA]: In my opinion, intergenerational dynamics come into play in city government when creating and cultivating new policies. There is a delicate balance in city government between implementing new, progressive ideas and doing what has worked in the past. This is where I think individuals of different generations may clash with one another over what should or can be done.

Seminar Overview

Intergenerational Training Question & Answer

Why is it important to have conversations like the ones we had during the workshop?

[MR]: Along with exposing stereotypes, they're important in showing that different generations have different access to power within city government. It's a complex and nuanced issue, which is why I thought this discussion was one of the richest parts of our workshop conversation.

[CA]: It is important to have open conversations about how to manage intergenerational dynamics because individuals will have to know how to deal with them both in and out of the workplace. Understanding what these dynamics are and how to be thoughtful when interacting with people who have different experiences is essential to communicating effectively. Creating the framework for change or having fruitful conversations about change starts with having conversations that keep in mind the experiences people bring to the table.

What was your biggest take-away from the workshop and what was your favorite part?

[MR]: My favorite part of the workshop was having a chance to meet and talk with some of the Urban Fellows. Many of my colleagues in the Leadership Institute echoed this sentiment. You are a very smart, thoughtful, impressive group of young people, and it was inspiring to hear about your current work with the City and your future interests and aspirations in public service.

[CA]: I loved when we broke off into small groups and had the opportunity to chat with members of the Leadership Institute. In one of the rounds, I was in a group of four women who were all talking about their experiences growing up in other difficult political eras – so much of the discussion centered around how they personally understood what I and many other people in my generation are going through and how to stay hopeful. It was awesome connecting with city government leadership around these issues and incredibly reassuring to hear how they thrived under similar circumstances.



Newsletter Team:
Aarati Cohly, Katie Fallon, Mary Russo, & Jake Seidman