

Community Compensation Fund

2026 Inaugural Pilot Report



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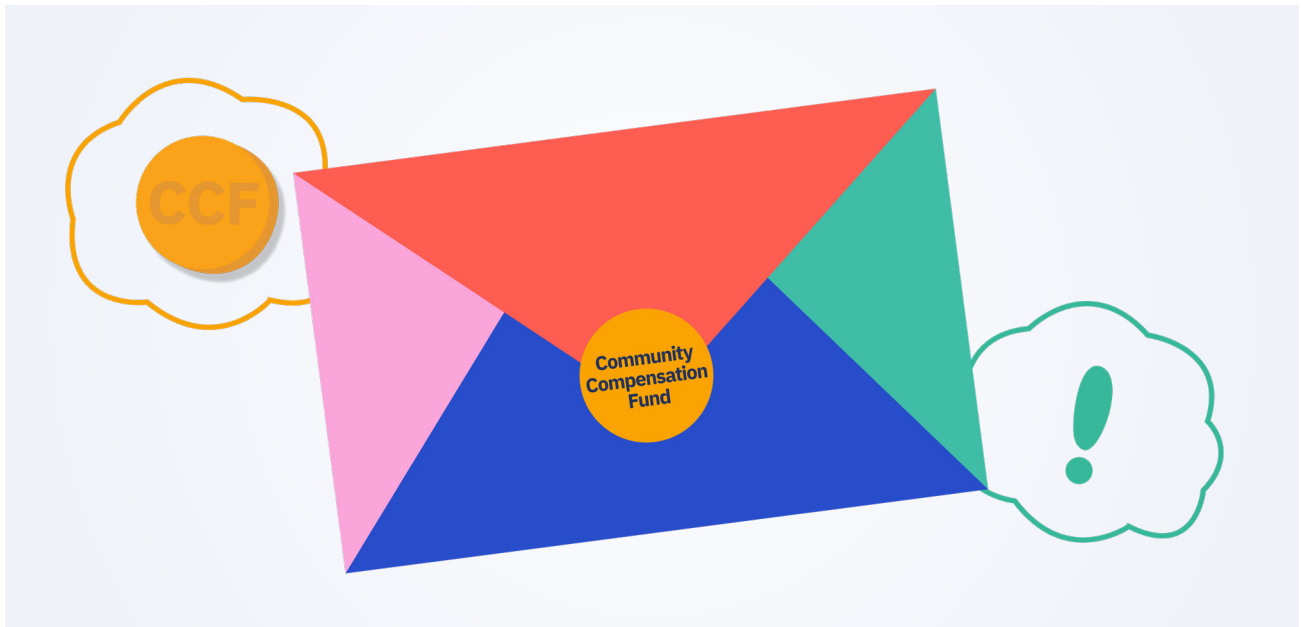
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Executive Summary

Executive Summary



In 2023, the New York City Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) began piloting the Community Compensation Fund (CCF, or “The Fund”), an innovative approach to compensating NYC residents who participate in research aimed at improving the design and delivery of City services. By enabling agencies to pay residents involved in City research activities, the Fund promotes more inclusive engagement and encourages the inclusion of perspectives that have historically been underrepresented in civic decision-making. The program is funded through the City University of New York (CUNY), administered by NYC Opportunity’s Service Design Studio (SDS), and operated by the [ideas42](#) NYC Behavioral Design Team (BDT), a nonprofit behavioral design consultancy.

Since its launch in January 2023, ideas42 and SDS (collectively, the “CCF team”) have developed a framework for applying for, managing, and tracking the distribution of funds, guided by behavioral design principles and best practices for participatory research. City agencies can pay residents with gift cards for specific research activities (e.g., completing a survey) or offer a stipend for ongoing participation (e.g., consulting on research project design).

Throughout the pilot, the CCF team has collected ongoing feedback on the model and conducted a thorough evaluation with both City staff and NYC residents who received funds. This report highlights the Fund’s achievements, shares findings from the evaluation, and suggests potential directions for the CCF’s development. These insights lay the groundwork for an evidence-based approach to advancing community compensation practices across New York City.

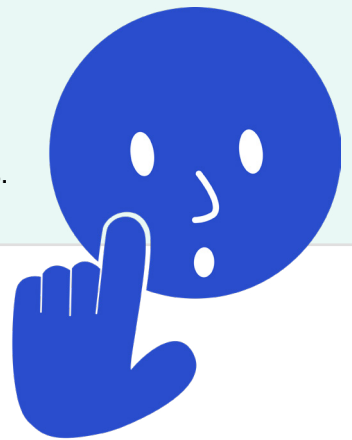
Accomplishments at a Glance

During the first years of the CCF (January 2023-June 2025), the CCF team achieved the following:

1. Established a standardized process for City agencies to apply for funding, including systems for application tracking and approval.
2. Managed application review, approval, and disbursement of gift cards to approved City partners.
3. Managed application review, approval, and disbursement of compensation for participant researchers, researchers who are both part of the group being studied and also researching on behalf of City partners.
4. Supported the expansion of participatory research practices across City agencies, developing best practice tools.
5. Captured feedback from City agency staff and gift card recipients on the process and impact of participant compensation and began to build an evidence base to inform future phases of the Fund.

The CCF Team has achieved the following outcomes that support the above goals:

- **16** New York City agencies submitted project proposals
- **59** requests and **44** unique projects received approval for funding to compensate
- **1,230** NYC residents were compensated for informing City work.
- A total of **\$121,365.80** in compensation has been approved for agencies and distributed to participants. This includes:
 - **\$51,092.80** in gift cards (both digital and physical) and
 - **\$70,273** paid to participant researchers
- **30** peer researchers have been employed as independent contractors.



About this Report

About this Report

This report details the development and progress of New York City’s CCF pilot, one of the first official efforts to institutionalize community compensation within the New York City government. It highlights the pilot’s initial outcomes and offers practical guidance for government agencies, nonprofits, and research teams looking to establish or expand similar community compensation initiatives. By presenting the Fund’s structure, operational approach, evaluation insights, and lessons learned, we aim to contribute to an expanding body of work focused on ethical, inclusive, and equity-centered participatory research in the public sector.





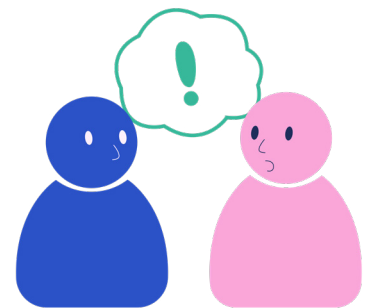
Introduction: The Importance of Community Compensation

Introduction: The Importance of Community Compensation

Centering residents' lived experience is essential for creating city services that are both effective and equitable. People who depend on public systems often have valuable insights into what works and what doesn't. To make sure these perspectives are heard, participation must be inclusive and not limited to those who can afford to contribute their time without compensation. Providing payment to community members for their time and input is not only fair, it is necessary to remove barriers to participation. Compensation recognizes the worth of their expertise and encourages continuous involvement, guiding the development of city programs and services that directly affect their lives.

The practice of compensating community members has sparked ongoing debate, with some critics raising concerns about whether compensation may act as an undue incentive that skews research findings or, in some cases, crosses ethical lines by creating a sense of pressure to participate that undermines an individual's ability to genuinely volunteer.

However, existing research on the impacts of community member compensation – most of which comes from the healthcare sector – suggests that offering compensation boosts and diversifies research participation, increases task completion rates,¹ and only slightly decreases data reliability (e.g., test-retest reliability).² Furthermore, the research shows no evidence of compensation functioning as a coercive measure. Rather, offering compensation may act as a proxy for trust, helping to overcome existing distrust between researchers and participants.³ Based on ideas42's 15 years of experience conducting in-depth qualitative research with communities experiencing poverty and psychological trauma, perceptions of coercion are more likely to result from improper and unethical research practices, like a lack of a proper consent protocol or failure to incorporate trauma-informed research practices, than offering compensation. Overall, the benefits are found to outweigh the risks.



1 Meier, S., Cheng, A., Tischbein, M., Shyr, C., Jerome, R. N., Edwards, T. L., Stroud, M., Wilkins, C. H., & Harris, P. A. (2024). Impact of financial compensation on enrollment and participation in a remote, mobile-app based research study. *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*, 8(1), e75. doi:10.1017/cts.2024.515

2 Kost, R. G., & Correa da Rosa, J. (2018). Impact of survey length and compensation on validity, reliability, and sample characteristics for Ultrashort-, Short-, and Long-Research Participant Perception Surveys. *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*, 2(1), 31–37. doi:10.1017/cts.2018.18

3 Kost, R. G., & Correa da Rosa, J. (2018). Impact of survey length and compensation on validity, reliability, and sample characteristics for Ultrashort-, Short-, and Long-Research Participant Perception Surveys. *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*, 2(1), 31–37. doi:10.1017/cts.2018.18

Scholars exploring the ethics of compensation argue that paying participants should be standard practice, equating it to “fair remuneration for analogously time-consuming and burdensome, albeit unskilled, employment.” They further contend that compensation is not inherently coercive but instead acknowledges participants for what they are – experts in the matter they are being asked to address. According to the leading formal ethical framework for participant compensation in healthcare settings, to prevent concerns of coercion or exploitation, researchers must ensure that participants benefit from the research, with the findings used to improve or positively impact the lives of people like the participant.⁴ Another view contends that “in participatory work, we must remember that we are engaging with individuals as colleagues and partners, not as research subjects, constituents, or program participants. Paying people for their time is not an incentive, it’s compensation for their expertise”.⁵ This framework is a core value at the foundation of how the CCF was designed, and we continue to keep this at the center of the Fund as it grows and evolves.

Much of the literature on participant compensation comes from the healthcare setting, and this practice remains relatively rare in government research contexts. However, an increasing number of government agencies and municipalities are starting to implement or

publicly consider compensation models similar to New York City’s CCF. At the time of writing, we have identified at least 12 other models operating at local, state, and even federal levels (see [Appendix E](#)). Based on our review of publicly available information, we find that the CCF aligns closely with the guiding principles of these efforts, while being specifically tailored to the unique context of New York City, its people, and its government.

NYC’s Vision for Community Compensation

With this knowledge in mind, the Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity and its Service Design Studio partnered with the NYC Behavioral Design Team – a partnership between nonprofit behavioral design consultancy ideas42 and NYC Opportunity – to pilot the Community Compensation Fund. The Fund provides a formal mechanism for New Yorkers to receive compensation for their input and expertise when participating in research conducted by the City.

For years, New York City agencies have wanted to bring resident perspectives more directly into their work, but they lacked a clear way to do so. While staff consistently sought community input, there was no formal mechanism to compensate residents for their time. Agencies relied on improvised strategies, such as offering

4 Gelinas, L., Largent, E. A., Cohen, I. G., Kornetsky, S., Bierer, B. E., & Fernandez Lynch, H. (2018). A framework for ethical payment to research participants. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 378(8), 766–771. <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmsb1710591>

5 Langness, M., Cedano, S., Morgan, J. W., & Falkenburger, E. (2023). *Equitable Compensation for Community Engagement Guidebook*. The Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Equitable%20Compensation.pdf>

food or small gifts like tote bags, or partnering with external research organizations and layering additional questions onto existing studies to capture insights beyond a project's immediate scope. These efforts reflected a genuine desire to conduct participatory research, but they were constrained by structural barriers such as procurement restrictions, strict rules around incentives, and long delays in releasing funds.

This interest in bringing community members into the work and fairly compensating them for their time makes the CCF a critical mechanism for making participatory research more accessible for agencies.

The core mission of this partnership was to develop a system for administering payments legally, inclusively, and conveniently to New Yorkers, while also generating an evidence base to garner sustained investment in community compensation models across the City. To define success for the CCF, the CCF team envisioned a process that not only directly

compensated New Yorkers for their time and input shaped by lived experience but also demonstrated the broader importance of compensating New Yorkers in participatory research. In our inaugural blog post introducing the Community Compensation Fund publicly, we established the following vision statement to describe why the Fund exists:

“Centering lived experiences is fundamental to the integrity and quality of public services.

As we began to create the systems and tools needed to implement the Fund, we returned to this guiding statement at every stage – ensuring that each element, from design and administration to communications, reflected our core principles of integrity, appreciation, inclusivity, and trust.



The CCF Model

The CCF Model

Overview

The CCF provides NYC agencies with a mechanism to compensate residents for their time in research engagements. Agencies can apply for:

- **Gift cards** for short-term engagements (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups)
 - This includes **digital** and **physical Visa gift cards**, for which the applying teams choose the best fit for their audience
- **Independent contractors** for longer-term engagements (e.g., serving as peer researchers)

The experience of requesting and receiving gift cards from the CCF is as follows:

 01 Application for Funding	You complete and submit an online application form.
 02 Application Evaluation	Ideas 42 does initial review and meets with the Studio team to finalize determinations.
 03 Gift Card Delivery	Ideas42 confirms distribution methods with agency team.
 04 Distribute Gift Cards	You compensate the community member who participates in your engagement by distributing gift cards.

Our Budget

The CCF operates with an annual budget of approximately \$100,000. In the first year, it was allocated \$100,000, followed by an additional \$100,000 in the pilot’s second year and \$30,000 in the third.

The budget supports the two primary funding streams: **gift cards & independent contractors**.

Our Compensation Scale (FY23-FY25)

To create some consistency in compensation across CCF-funded projects, we established standard payment rates for common types of participatory research. These rates are outlined in the application form as follows:

\$10 for short surveys taking approximately 10 minutes or less to complete	\$20 for surveys requiring 20-30 minutes to complete
\$30 for interviews or participatory workshops lasting 30-45 minutes, or surveys exceeding 30 minutes	\$50 for interviews, focus groups, or participatory workshops lasting 45 minutes or more

Our Build-Out Activities

Throughout the pilot, the CCF team focused on developing an application, an orientation process, and supporting materials that would allow agencies to apply for, and for us to administer, participant payments. Operationally, this work spans five core areas, including:

1. **Reviewing and administering gift cards** to participants in approved short-term engagements for City agency projects;
2. **Administering stipends** to participant researchers engaged in long-term work with a City agency;
3. **Creating, maintaining, and enhancing** the knowledge management system behind the Fund as needed, including the creation of best practice tools for applicants;
4. **Increasing the visibility of the CCF** through multiple channels, including the NYC

Opportunity newsletter, public events, six BDT-hosted workshops, sessions led in partnership with Public Policy Lab, a presentation to the Digital Equity Working Group, NYC Opportunity All-Staff Meetings, and [Civic Design Forum](#) events, as well as word-of-mouth among agency participants and discussions during [BDT office hours](#); and,

5. **Capturing lessons learned and evaluating feedback and impact**, including participant and agency sentiment and qualitatively-reported outcomes.

Overview of CCF Functionality

The CCF utilizes a set of digital tools to facilitate the daily operation and decision-making of the Fund. In this section, we provide an overview of the specific platforms and services utilized by the CCF (as of the writing of this report). However, the CCF and its implementing partners do not endorse any particular platform or service as the best or only tool for a community compensation system. These tools were selected for a variety of reasons, including functionality, availability, familiarity, and cost to the researchers at the time of development. A similarly effective Fund may utilize an entirely different set of tools.

Current digital tools utilized by the CCF:

- **Airtable** serves as the CCF's central management platform.



The Airtable base hosts the online application used by agencies

to apply for funding, the evaluation tool for reviewing submissions, a comprehensive project database, budget tracking systems, and a series of automations that support communication with project teams. It supports five primary functions: application management, digital gift card distribution, participant and researcher tracking, budgeting and inventory oversight, and administering exit surveys.

- **Why we chose Airtable:** Airtable was selected early on as the hub of the Fund's management, due to its wide variety of functionality and capacity as a collaborative project management tool. As the Fund has expanded its reach, the flexibility of Airtable has enabled the management and automation of the Fund to scale and be fine-tuned in tandem, without creating undue or unsustainable oversight needs for the CCF team
- **Additional functions:**
 - i. Beyond its core functions, Airtable also supports the peer researcher work-stream by hosting the funding request application, tracking submitted invoices, and providing a file upload form for onboarding documentation.
 - ii. Airtable also plays a key role in digital gift card distribution, as participating

teams submit the names, contact information, and consent records of research participants via an Airtable form. This data is automatically transmitted to Tremendous (our gift card vendor, described below) through integrated automations, triggering the delivery of digital rewards, typically within fifteen minutes.

- **Tremendous** is the platform that provides the CCF's digital and physical visa reward cards. Project teams can apply for:
 - Digital gift cards, which are delivered directly to participants via email by Tremendous, or
 - Physical gift cards, which are shipped in bulk to agency teams for in-person distribution to participants.



- **Zapier** is a workflow automation tool that extends Airtable's capabilities by integrating it with other web applications. Within the CCF, Zapier routes approved digital gift card requests from Airtable to Tremendous and applies filters to monitor usage by project, blocking requests that exceed approved allocations.



Application Evaluation Criteria

All applications submitted to the CCF are evaluated against five key criteria. These criteria ensure that all projects align with the mission of the CCF and employ equity-centered, participatory research practices.



Poverty and Equity Focus:

Project aims to strengthen a human service that reduces the impacts of poverty and/or increases equity.



Center Community Agency:

Project uses protocols/methods to center community choice, agency, reciprocity, and respect.



Acknowledge Trauma:

Project work acknowledges the personal history and potential trauma of each participant.



Share Power:

Project team remains mindful of power dynamics and shares decision-making power.



Facilitate Thoughtfully:

Project work is led by skilled facilitators with experience in participatory practices.

Target Populations

The CCF aims to promote more equitable community involvement in city operations, with a particular focus on groups that have traditionally been excluded or marginalized in civic decision-making processes.

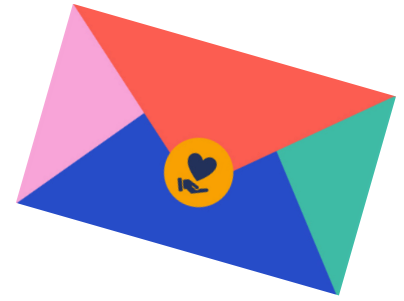
This includes, but is not limited to:

- Out-of-school and out-of-work youth,
- Criminal legal system-impacted individuals,
- Current and former sex workers,
- Survivors of violence,
- Individuals experiencing homelessness,
- Residents who are not connected to community based organizations,
- Individuals living with disabilities,
- Non-English speakers, and
- The undocumented population.



Accomplishments

Accomplishments



Cumulative Fund Activity Throughout the Pilot Period (FY23 - FY25)

While writing this report, the Community Compensation Fund has achieved the following milestones.

- **16 New York City agencies and teams submitted project proposals**, including the Administration for Children's Services, Community Board, CCHR, DCP, DFTA, DOE, DOHMH, DoITT, DYCD, HRA/DSS, NYC Opportunity, NYC Service, NYCHA, Operations, CEC, TLC.
 - **44 unique projects¹ approved for funding** across 59 approved requests²
- **1,230 NYC residents have received compensation for completed projects, or will receive compensation for active projects.**
- **A total of \$121,365.80 in compensation has been approved for** agencies and distributed to participants. This includes:
 - \$38,988 worth of physical gift cards have been approved and distributed to researchers (including fees).
 - \$12,104.80 worth of digital gift cards have been distributed.
 - \$70,273 has been paid to participant researchers.
- **30 peer researchers have received short-term contract positions** to support 4 unique project opportunities.
 - Project 1: A community liaison with lived experience led a six-month community research project with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. The researcher was paid monthly via direct deposit.
 - Project 2: A team of individuals impacted by homelessness informed the City's policy decisions surrounding housing and homelessness. Participants were compensated through a series of gift cards managed and distributed by City staff, including teams at City Hall and the Department of Homeless Services, at the suggestion of the requesting team.
 - Project 3: Five participant researchers supported the Jobs NYC mayoral initiative,

¹ Many projects funded by the CCF involve multiple rounds or types of research activities, each of which serves as its own request. For example, DOHMH conducted a series of interviews with 3 different community partners as part of a single initiative. As a result, one project was responsible for 3 separate funding requests.

² A total of 6 project requests have been denied to date due to ineligibility (see pg. 7 for eligibility criteria).

which aims to address unemployment in regions of the City disproportionately affected by it. The team led community engagement efforts, including outreach strategy and stakeholder engagement, and was paid bi-weekly via direct deposit.

- Project 4 (Ongoing): Former attendees of the CUNY Fatherhood Academy are conducting peer research to explore the experiences of current and past participants. This cohort is paid via direct deposit on a bi-weekly basis.
- **Public Knowledge Sharing:** We published two Medium articles outlining the Fund's purpose, use cases, and key considerations for ethically compensating community members. These articles were accompanied by regularly updated FAQs and guidance to support equitable and respectful approaches to community-engaged research.
- **Evidence Building and Lessons Learned:** Finally, the team documented key insights and lessons learned, which are detailed later in this report. We also contributed to the growing body of evidence on the impact of compensated participatory research and community engagement. For findings from participant surveys, reflections on the gift card process, and interviews with participant researchers, please see the section titled [Summary of Key Insights from the CCF Evaluation](#).



Project Outputs for FY25

- **10 New York City agencies and teams submitted project proposals**, including the ACS, CCHR, DCP, DOHMH, DoITT, HRA/DSS, NYC Opportunity, NYC Service, NYCHA, CEC
- **21 unique projects approved for funding in FY25** across 29 approved requests.
 - Only one project was denied in FY25.
- **717 NYC residents approved for compensation in FY25.**
- **A total of \$32,266.80 in compensation has been approved in FY25** for agencies and participants. This includes:
 - \$15,040 worth of physical gift cards have been approved and distributed to researchers (including fees).
 - \$3,944.80 worth of digital gift cards have been distributed.
 - \$13,282 has been paid to participant researchers.
- **8 participant researchers have been contracted** across 2 unique independent contracting opportunities.
- In FY25, we conducted an **impact evaluation of the CCF's first three years**, detailed in the next section.

Details of Project Reach

Requests received

To date, the CCF has received 65 individual requests, of which 59 have been approved.³ These 59 requests represent 44 distinct projects⁴ across 16 City agencies. Many projects funded by the CCF involve multiple rounds or types of research activities, each of which serves as its own request.

A small number of “**frequent flyers**” (i.e., agencies that have submitted multiple requests) have emerged. The most frequent user of the CCF is NYC Opportunity, a predictable finding given the CCF’s location within the agency and thus higher visibility to other project teams within it. “Frequent flyers” most commonly submit multiple requests to expand their scope or adjust gift card formats and values, allowing them to conduct different forms of participatory research.

Of the approved requests, five were later canceled or went unused. Six project requests were denied. The reasons for request denials included:

- Concerns about research topic sensitivity,
- Funding was found from another source,
- The size of the request exceeded per-project limits,
 - The maximum funding per project for first-time applicants to the Community Compensation Fund (CCF) is \$4,500, unless there are special circumstances. Requests exceeding this amount require additional review and justification.
 - The maximum funding per project for applicants who have previously received gift cards is \$6,000, unless there are special circumstances. Requests exceeding this amount require additional review and justification. Additionally, the implementation outcomes of past projects will also be considered.
- Projects attempted to conduct research with a population already compensated by the City (e.g., agency staff, provider staff paid through a City funded contract)

Request types

Usage across the two gift card formats was relatively balanced:

- 30 projects opted for digital gift cards
- 25 requested physical cards.

The number of gift cards requested per project ranged from 1 to 200, with an average of 27 cards per request. **Most projects requested and used between 15 and 20 cards.**

3 See supra note 6

4 See supra note 5

The majority of approved requests supported one-time interactions or commitments.

Only seven projects involved ongoing engagement, such as long-term participation or a series of workshops.

Notably, **completed projects used an average of 83% of the cards they requested**, indicating that most teams accurately estimated their needs and, in some cases, may have had the capacity to reach more participants with additional cards.

Research Methods	Research Themes & Topics
<p>The projects conducted using the Community Compensation Fund’s funding use a diverse range of research methods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 20 used surveys, almost all under 30 minutes in length• 15 conducted 1-on-1 interviews, typically lasting 45-60 minutes• 9 conducted focus groups or group interviews• 7 conducted some form of participatory workshop• 5 projects conducted research through other methods, including rapid website testing, facilitated memory sharing circles, and documentary making.	<p>Many of the projects approved covered multiple or intersecting themes, with the most frequently explored themes being workforce development, public benefits, and community input.</p> <p>The full range include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workforce development, including legal system involvement and language access• Public benefits, including case management and access• Public health, including mental health, gun violence, and other safety risks• Civic engagement• Youth interests, including childcare, education, and youth community engagement• Transportation and accessibility• Community input• Climate health• Racial justice and equity• Services for older New Yorkers



Insights from the Gift Card Qualitative Evaluation

Insights from the Gift Card Qualitative Evaluation



After three years of implementing the CCF, we wanted to go beyond operational milestones and explore impact by asking: **Is the Fund achieving its goals?** To answer that, from October 2024 through April 2025, we conducted an outcome evaluation focused on the experiences of both City agency staff and the New Yorkers who participated in their research projects.

This evaluation served two purposes:

1. To build a qualitative evidence base to support long-term City investment in ethical, sustainable compensation models for engaging communities through participatory research.
2. To inform improvements to the CCF model, ensuring that it remains responsive, effective, and equitable in practice.

Research Goals

The evaluation focused on five key goals:

Goal 1

Understand City agency experiences with the CCF process, including applying for, receiving, and distributing gift cards.

Goal 2

Explore the types of participatory research conducted, staff capacity needs, and how research insights are applied.

Goal 3

Assess how City staff perceive the effect of CCF-provided compensation on research quality and engagement.

Goal 4

Learn about participant experiences with compensated research engagements.

Goal 5

Assess the effects of compensation on equity and inclusion in government feedback collection.

A comprehensive list of research questions guiding this evaluation is provided in [Appendix A](#).

Research Methods

This evaluation consisted of three research methods:

1. **NYC agency staff interviews:** The CCF team conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with staff at NYC agencies who had previously received funds from the CCF to support their research projects. These interviews explored City staff's overall experience with participatory research, their impressions of the CCF application and distribution process, and how the Fund supported or influenced their work.
2. **NYC agency staff survey:** The CCF team concurrently surveyed staff at NYC agencies

who had previously received funds from the CCF to support their research projects, who were unavailable to participate in an interview. This 46-question survey explored the same topics as our interviews, including participants' experiences with participatory research, their impressions of the CCF application and distribution process, and their reflections on participatory research activities funded through the CCF.

3. **Gift card recipient survey:** The CCF team also conducted a 20-question survey of New Yorkers who had received gift cards as compensation for participating in CCF-funded projects. This survey aimed to understand participants' attitudes towards participating in City-led research, their attitudes towards the compensation offered, and the self-reported impact of compensation on their interest in and engagement with City research efforts. Participants were compensated with a \$10 digital gift card, funded through the CCF.

Additional research methods

In addition to the methods described above, the CCF team conducted additional qualitative research throughout the entire pilot period. Where relevant, we reference findings from these additional activities to further enrich and contextualize insights from our formal evaluation.

Ongoing feedback surveys: At the launch of the CCF, we developed three surveys to gather feedback on both the process of obtaining gift cards and the impact of offering monetary compensation for participatory research. These surveys helped us assess how the pilot was functioning, identify areas for improvement, and understand the perceptions of agency staff regarding participant compensation.

- Teams requesting physical gift cards received two surveys:
 - One focused on the gift card request and distribution process
 - One focused on post-project evaluation
- Teams requesting digital gift cards received a single combined survey that covered both *process feedback and overall project reflections*.

Peer researcher interviews: As part of our broader learning efforts, we conducted interviews and surveys with two peer researchers and two supervisors, representing three separate projects, in addition to the methods listed above. We have decided to share these early insights and reflections based on these interviews. We hope these findings prompt ideas for future program development, but these insights should not be interpreted as a formal part of our evaluation.

Who We Reached

Across the three primary research methods, we reached the following groups:

- **NYC agency staff:** We spoke to or received survey responses from **15** out of 20 staff members who applied for CCF funding and remained in their roles at the agency for which they received funding. This included 12 interviews and 3 completed surveys. These participants represented 9 different City agencies.
- **Gift card recipients:** We received a total of **59** completed survey responses from gift card recipients. Of these, **six** responses were excluded from our analysis, as they were flagged as likely duplicates. **One** was excluded as it was received after our survey window had formally closed.
 - Our analysis includes the remaining **52** responses. Across these 52 responses, we heard from New Yorkers who received gift cards for participating in **11** different projects.. These responses reflect the experiences of New Yorkers who participated in **11** different CCF-funded projects.

See [Appendix B](#) for an exploration of the limitations of this evaluation and [Appendix C](#) for the demographics of the gift card recipient survey respondents.

Summary of Key Insights from the CCF Evaluation

Below is a high-level summary of the most compelling and meaningful takeaways that reflect the promise, power, and future potential of the Community Compensation Fund (CCF). A full description of our evaluation findings (including challenges, successes, and participant feedback) can be found in [Appendix D](#).

1. The CCF is a catalyst for more equitable and effective research

City agency staff overwhelmingly agreed that the CCF made their research more inclusive, ethical, and grounded in community realities. By offering legal and logistical support for participant compensation, the CCF enabled teams to engage broader, more diverse populations, including those historically excluded from research due to financial or logistical barriers. In practice, this meant agencies were able to reach New Yorkers from a wider range of ages, races, income levels, and neighborhoods. Staff noted that without the CCF, **many projects would have been smaller in scope, less rigorous, or never conducted at all.**

Although some teams were worried that incentives might bias research results, experience showed this was not the case. In fact, providing gift cards through the CCF **helped teams recruit a broader**

and more diverse group of New Yorkers by intentionally considering factors such as age, race, income, and neighborhood when setting quotas and recruitment plans. Several teams observed that **offering compensation enabled broader participation, attracting a more diverse group than they could typically reach, and sometimes allowed agencies to extend beyond their usual target populations.**

“This just makes it so much more possible—and I think makes us feel much better about the way we do our process.”

2. Compensation boosts participation and purpose

Offering compensation was not just a recruitment tool; it was a signal of respect and a structural shift toward equity. Staff viewed it as ethically necessary, particularly when working with marginalized communities. **Participants felt more seen, respected, and valued by the government,** and some even reported a more positive view of City agencies after taking part in CCF-supported research.

- 77% of survey respondents said compensation influenced their willingness to participate.
- 35% said their opinion of the government improved after participating.

3. Participatory research sparked immediate and long-term change

Research funded by the CCF didn't just sit on the shelf. **Staff reported making immediate changes to services, communications, and program delivery based on what they learned from community input.** Staff used CCF funding for various projects, including website testing, pilot program development, feedback collection, and needs assessments. They shared that this research helped them challenge assumptions about how their programs and services are actually delivered. It highlighted issues such as the curse of knowledge (i.e., the mistaken belief that everyone understands the same information, as seen in the overuse of unfamiliar acronyms in some projects). Feedback generally fell into several main categories: preferences for service locations, accessibility needs for communication, understanding of written materials, expansion of programs, and the usability of new technology introduced by the City. Adjustments could be made more quickly for projects evaluating existing programs or testing tangible products, such as communications.

In other cases, findings laid the groundwork for more profound organizational or even policy-level shifts, as in the case of one project that culminated in the presentation – given to elected officials – sharing findings and recommendations on increasing young adults' feelings of safety and peace in

New York City. (Note: Researchers expect that the elected officials will use these recommendations to support funding for collaborative school-level programs and committees , as well as restorative justice programming, though at the time of this writing, no changes have been made) Respondents noted that more significant changes would require additional time for planning and assessing their feasibility. The CCF also helped shift the mindset of participating teams, moving participatory research from a “nice-to-have” to an essential practice.

“We were able to implement things right on the spot... and what they said made the difference.”

“They were able to put all their research together and show it to the point where the [research team members] even are going to City Hall. ”

4. The peer researcher model brought cultural competency and raised structural questions

Peer researchers (PRs) with lived experience helped deepen trust, improve data quality, and bridge cultural gaps between City staff and the community members they work with, per City staff. However, the program surfaced a need for clearer structures: PRs need full integration into project workflows, access to communication tools such as email and chat channels, and clearer post-project pathways to make their work sustainable and impactful.

“We wouldn’t have been able to ask what we asked without him on the team. It wouldn’t have been ethical.”

“Being able to hire contractors through this process was key in implementing participatory strategies and building evidence to implement programs and broaden economic opportunities.”

5. Staff want more support to build lasting capacity

Many agency teams expressed excitement about continuing participatory research, but also identified specific needs: more time and staffing, access to tools (e.g., translation, transcription), more explicit compensation guidance, and resources for research design. **City staff see the CCF as a strong foundation** – but one that could have even more impact if paired with training, templates, and opportunities to learn from other agencies doing similar work.

6. The CCF's growth will rely on visibility, flexibility, and knowledge sharing

The Fund remains underutilized due to limited visibility. Many teams suggested broader outreach and increased funding per project to allow for fairer compensation and deeper engagement. Staff also called for aggregating and sharing findings from CCF-supported projects to build momentum and establish participatory research as a Citywide norm.

“What I want to see is that sea change—where community input is the default.”



Future Directions for the CCF

Future Directions for the CCF

The CCF evaluation surfaced several opportunities to strengthen the Fund and better support the City agencies and New Yorkers who engage with it. Feedback from interviews and surveys highlights potential improvements to the application and evaluation processes, as well as ways to better assist research teams as participatory research becomes more embedded within City agencies.

1. **Application clarification and enhancement:** Application submissions often omit key details regarding a research initiative's recruitment plan and overall project structure. As this information significantly influences our funding decisions, we typically schedule follow-up conversations to gather these details. The consistency with which these key details are omitted signals a need for greater clarity in the application questions to highlight this request. Additionally, the evaluation criteria can be adjusted to account for differences between projects while maintaining an emphasis on equity and community-centered research design. We may also build on the experience of teams that used the application to deepen their research plans by incorporating features that help new teams learn how to design participatory research project processes (e.g., providing easily accessible consent protocol templates or links to guidance on recruitment methods).
2. **Higher compensation rates and flexible funding:** Some teams suggested that gift card amounts could be increased beyond the guidance provided by the CCF to enhance the incentive for participants in recognition of the rising cost of living in the City. This is an area the CCF will revisit while continuing to prioritize fair compensation aligned with the time contributed by participants.
3. **Participatory research tools and capacity strengthening:** As the prevalence of participatory research increases among City agency teams, the CCF may provide more extensive support for teams that are interested in community feedback but lack the expertise to design research protocols to effectively and equitably engage with community members. This might include:
 - a. Publishing written guidance on how to develop research plans and tools,
 - b. Offering office hours to troubleshoot specific challenges with research teams,
 - c. Hosting training on how to facilitate participatory research,
 - d. Developing guidelines and templates for sharing a project's research findings back to participants and validating insights or recommended next steps , and
 - e. Proposing benchmarks (or "rules of thumb") for sample size and compensation rates.

One team suggested that the CCF might provide additional funding to allow research teams to adopt more inclusive research practices, for example, by providing ASL interpretation and child care services. The CCF team is actively exploring compensation methods and partnership opportunities to provide these additional resources.

4. **Community of practice:** Several agency teams suggested that they would benefit from participating in a community of practice with other agency teams conducting participatory research. In particular, researchers noted that they are interested in learning from their peers, particularly around creative research activities, recruitment strategies, and other opportunities for shared discussion and idea exchange.
5. **Increase awareness:** Although the CCF has grown significantly since its inception, many teams reported being surprised to find that the CCF was not more widely used by their agency or partner agencies. Proponents of participatory research strongly believe that the CCF should be more broadly adopted across city government to help institutionalize the integration of community perspectives into program and policy design. To support this vision, the CCF will continue to promote the Fund through existing channels and explore new opportunities to expand its reach.

In FY26, the CCF team will strategize ways to iterate based on the above recommendations. The project team will also streamline, update, and scale the application, orientation, and outreach materials to ensure they reflect the feedback from both research participants and agency teams. Core operations will continue, including the management and distribution of both the gift card program and the peer researcher program. Additionally, the team will craft updated operations guidance and begin planning for the Fund's long-term sustainability and administration.





Guidance for Adapting or Replicating the Fund

Guidance for Adapting or Replication the Fund

As noted at the beginning of this report, government entities across the country and beyond have long faced significant barriers to compensating community members for their time and input. Procurement restrictions, strict rules on incentives (even for small items like food), and lengthy delays in releasing funds made direct compensation difficult.

The creation of funds like the CCF, operated in partnership with external organizations, can be one method of addressing these challenges.

As the Fund evolves, it may be adapted for use in new contexts – whether with different funders, expanded budgets, or new geographic locations. Any such changes will require careful updates to operational processes and policies.

Guidance on Compensating Research Teams

Select compensation rates that align with program values and local cost of living. The CCF team has established a payment scale outlined in the “Our compensation scale” section that aligns with the ideas42’s compensation scales for participants. The goal is to provide generous and comprehensive compensation, reflecting valuable feedback from participants with lived experience. The payment scale also takes into account the high cost of living in New York City and the current minimum wage rate of \$16.50 per hour. Additionally, this compensation scale matches the participant researcher’s wage of \$32 per hour, given that the research engagement is a one-time, intensive participation. These payment rates have been well-received by the teams requesting funds so far and are unlikely to be changed in the immediate future. However, as we explore more use cases of the Fund, we will continue to assess the appropriate level of compensation for other types of participatory research and utilize external research on the topic such as [MIT’s Living Wage Calculator](#).

Ensure payment options are equitable and accessible to all recipients. The CCF team carefully considered which payment options to use for the Fund. As mentioned above, the CCF team decided to offer compensation uniformly through Visa gift cards because they can be easily used at almost any retailer, both online and in person, can be added to mobile wallets, and do not require research teams to gather any personally identifiable information from participants. The CCF also considered:

- **Bank transfers:** We have opted not to offer bank transfers as a payment method, as they can often take up to two business days to process.



This could be a deterrent for any participant who intends to use the compensation immediately. Additionally, bank transfers require that participants have a bank account, precluding unbanked individuals from receiving payment from the CCF.

- **Cash payments:** We opted not to issue cash payments due to the logistical challenges associated with stockpiling, safeguarding, and dispersing cash.

Prepaid gift cards, the most widely available of which are Visa gift cards, serve as a close analog to cash payments, allowing for the flexibility to use them online or in person without needing to visit a bank. Thus far, City agencies have been able to choose either the physical or digital form of Visa gift cards for their participants using a rubric provided in the CCF Medium blog post's FAQ section. No feedback to date suggests that the current options for compensation are inadequate or needs reconsideration. However, a few participants have shared initial confusion around how to use or register cards. Researchers should be provided with answers to frequently asked questions, along with direct contact information (such as links or email addresses) for the gift card vendor in case additional issues arise.

Guidance on Fund Management

- **Tailor review criteria to the local context:** The current review criteria reflect the values of the CCF's pilot team. In applying this model elsewhere or with different funders, these criteria should be reassessed and changed as needed. For example, in a context where community trust in government is particularly low, the future Funds might emphasize partnerships with trusted local organizations and require applicants to demonstrate meaningful co-design with community members from the outset, rather than engagement after research plans are finalized.
- **Adjust review processes to reflect scale:** The CCF prioritized directing as much of its budget as possible to research participants across the City. This approach has enabled all eligible projects to receive the requested gift cards. This has also created flexibility to test more efficient (though sometimes more expensive) operational strategies, including automating the Fund through paid subscriptions to Zapier and Airtable and piloting direct delivery of gift cards to City agencies in place of bulk ordering cards. However, if the Fund faces increased demand or a tighter budget, we anticipate more selective decision-making to be necessary. In these cases, the team managing the Fund will need to adopt additional criteria and/or protocols to help determine what projects will be approved when resources are limited.

- **Manage gift card vendor constraints and minimize gift card waste:** The CCF has relied on Tremendous as its gift card vendor due to its cost-efficacy, allowing us to provide both physical and digital gift cards to agencies with relative ease and minimal overhead costs. However, gift cards expire one calendar year after issuance. This prompted us to switch to an on-demand model of ordering cards, minimizing spending waste and administrative burden. However, this change slightly increased turnaround time after cards are approved, to account for Tremendous’s delivery and processing times.
 - For long-term projects, teams should be mindful of card expiration timelines and consider using a “first in, first out” distribution strategy to avoid loss.

- **Build visibility and understanding of participatory research:** Although participatory research is widely valued by City staff, it is not yet a standard practice across NYC agencies. To maximize the impact of the CCF, the team has actively worked to increase awareness of both the Fund and the broader importance of participatory research, such as by hosting a Citywide convening for agency staff. When scaling the CCF to new contexts, it’s important to assess the baseline familiarity with participatory research and plan outreach accordingly. Publicizing the Fund and building understanding of its purpose and opportunities for staff to gain needed research skills, should be integral to any expansion strategy.

- **Communicate the Fund’s mission and values publicly.** In assuming the management of the CCF, the CCF team prioritized building an evidence base for the value of compensation for participatory research. As such, articulating the vision statement of the Fund and how applications would be reviewed systematically was an immediate priority for the team. To guide our implementation and define success, the team published a blog post outlining the Fund’s goals and values (as previously described in [“The CCF Model”](#) section).
 - For any similar fund, it is essential to clearly and concisely communicate the mission and values that inform the review process. Doing so ensures that applying agency teams know what is expected of them and how they can design participatory activities in alignment with the fund’s goals.

- **Choose a gift card distribution process that is easy and transparent for busy staff to complete.** Through the evaluation and pilot phase of the CCF, research teams were required to pick up their gift cards at the ideas42 office in Lower Manhattan. While the pick up process was fairly straightforward – thanks, in part, an automated email, prompting approved teams to schedule a pickup time on our calendar, and direct communication with the team through text and email on the day of pickup – some early issues arose, including important

pickup details being overlooked and issues locating the office. As a result, important pickup details were missed. To address this, we updated the confirmation email to clarify and draw attention to these details to make them easier to find, even when skimming.

- For digital cards, distribution is triggered by project staff by entering the participant's email address into a digital form via Airtable. Tremendous, the digital gift card vendor, then automatically sends the participant an email with redemption instructions. Some City staff noted that once the digital gift card form was submitted, there was no built-in tracking to confirm whether their gift cards had been successfully delivered to participants. This left staff feeling unsure whether their distribution was successful.

Staff wanted to verify if participants had received the digital gift cards. While we can confirm when a recipient clicks the redemption link, current technical limitations (with Tremendous) prevent us from verifying whether a card has been fully claimed. However, we created an automation to allow us to easily send researching staff an emailed list of all email addresses compensated thus far.

- When creating a gift card delivery model, consider how receiving and distributing cards can be made easy and efficient for staff, whether that means highlighting pertinent details, streamlining delivery processes, or even just being aware of limitations of your model and working around them creatively.

- **Automate gift card delivery.** Although our enhanced communications helped address many applicants' gift card pickup challenges, survey respondents in the evaluation mentioned that their busy individual schedules were a primary barrier to timely gift card pickup. Delivering gift cards to agency offices would eliminate the need for travel and scheduling, and overall would be a welcome improvement. Since then, the CCF team has found a way to implement this request, directly delivering gift cards to agency offices, thus streamlining the process and making it more convenient for all. For similar funds, consider how pick up schedules and offerings can be adapted to be **convenient, salient, and efficient** on all sides.



Conclusion

Conclusion

In just two and a half years, the CCF has reached more than a thousand New Yorkers, creating an opportunity to demonstrate that their input and expertise are valuable and, in turn, highly valued by the City. In addition to the overwhelmingly positive sentiment shared by recipients and researchers, the Fund has fulfilled its core purpose: affirming the basic necessity of compensating those voices that are drawn upon for research. But as our evaluation shows, the Fund's capacity to have a positive impact extends well beyond this baseline.

Compensation doesn't coerce participation; it opens the door to it. By reducing barriers, CCF has enabled New Yorkers to have an equitable role in shaping City programs and policies. For many participating in research, a CCF-funded project was their first experience of being asked to participate in City research. As a result, the Fund has helped to introduce more city residents and agency staff to participatory research and has shown through our evaluation a high willingness among participants to engage again in the future.

At the same time, the Fund has enabled City agency teams to take up participatory research, making space and drawing attention to the value

and importance of including community voice in how services, programs, and processes are designed and administered. In doing so, the CCF helps to support the City government in serving New Yorkers. While the CCF has operated at pilot-scale, its reach has grown consistently, and its potential is clear. What began as a pilot has grown into a promising mechanism for more inclusive, community-centered research across City government. The Fund has already started to shift norms, demonstrating what is possible when community members are not only invited to participate but meaningfully compensated for their time and expertise.

As this report has shown, **the CCF is not just a funding tool; it is a signal of the City's commitment to equity, partnership, and accountability in public service.** Moving forward, the CCF team remains committed to expanding the Fund's reach, building

infrastructure to support participatory research, and continuously refining our approach based on the voices of those we serve. With sustained attention, collaboration, and learning, the CCF can continue to transform how government listens to, and learns, from New Yorkers,

Get Involved with the Community Compensation Fund



Work for an NYC agency and want to learn more?

- Applications to the CCF can be submitted [using our Airtable form](#).
- Learn more:
 - Read NYC Opportunity's blog post, "[Engage NYC Residents Meaningfully with the Community Compensation Fund](#),"
 - Watch [a short video](#) about the Fund, or
 - Explore [our list of considerations for ethical research and community engagement](#).



Appendix

Appendix A: Research Questions and Sub-questions

The following research goals (bolded) and corresponding questions guided both the design of our evaluation tools and the framing of our analysis. These goals were determined through careful reflection on the Fund's first two years of operation, as well as a review of over twenty relevant research papers, reports, white papers, and other forms of published media. This process helped us identify the most pressing questions around how compensation is experienced, implemented, and valued in public-sector research contexts.

Goal 1:

Understand the experiences of City agency teams with the CCF process, including applying for, receiving, and disseminating gift cards to New Yorkers.

- How do City agency teams perceive the ease or difficulty of the application process for gift cards from the CCF?
What challenges do City agency teams face when applying for gift cards from the CCF?
- What strategies, if any, do City agency teams employ to maximize their chances of successfully applying for gift cards from the CCF?
- What barriers, if any, do City agency teams encounter in the process of receiving and handling gift cards from the CCF?
- How do City agency teams determine the appropriate recipients for the gift cards received from the CCF?
What challenges do City agency teams face in ensuring the equitable distribution of gift cards received from the CCF?
- What strategies do City agency teams use to disseminate gift cards to their intended beneficiaries effectively?

Goal 2:

Explore the types of participatory research activities conducted by City agency staff, their staff capacity needs, insights from their research, and how these insights were applied to their work.

- How do City agency staff feel about the importance or impact of participatory research generally for their work?
- How do City agency staff feel about the importance of compensating research participants generally?
- Do City agency staff feel adequately resourced to conduct participatory research through the CCF?
What additional capacities do City agency staff need on their teams to conduct practical participatory research activities (i.e., assistance writing research plans, training on qualitative research, additional staffing)?
- What key insights or findings have City agency staff gained from their participatory research activities funded by the CCF?
- What mechanisms or strategies do City agency staff use to ensure that insights from participatory research activities are effectively integrated into their day-to-day work and operations?
- What kinds of projects are applying for CCF funding?
What patterns have emerged, if any?

Goal 3:

Understand how City agency staff view the impact of receiving funds from the CCF to compensate participants.

- How would teams have gone about doing this research project if CCF funds had not been available? What other sources have they drawn upon to provide incentives to participants?
- How do City agency teams view or interpret the impact of disseminating gift cards received from the CCF to participants? Why so?
 - What are the perceived benefits and challenges associated with using CCF funds to compensate participants, as viewed by City agency staff?

- In what ways do City agency staff perceive that using CCF funds for participant compensation contributes to ethical considerations and participant engagement in their research endeavors?
- In what ways do City agency staff believe that compensating participants with CCF funds enhances the quality or outcomes of their research efforts (i.e., richer data, more insights, higher engagement)?
- How has the availability of CCF funds for participant compensation influenced City agency staff's approach to planning and conducting research activities? What adjustments or improvements have City agency staff made to their research practices as a result of using CCF funds for participant compensation?
- How do stakeholders (e.g., participants, community members, supervisors) perceive the practice of compensating participants with funds from the CCF as implemented by City agency staff? What feedback or reactions have City agency staff received from stakeholders regarding the use of CCF funds for participant compensation? How are these addressed?
- How can the CCF be improved to maximize impact on participants and the results of participatory research?

Goal 4:
Learn about participant experiences when taking part in City agency research activities.

- Does offering compensation make research participants more likely to participate?
 - Have participants previously participated in research with a city agency? When? How were they recruited? Were they compensated?

- Are participants willing to spend more time on research activities? And/or partake in more sensitive conversations?
- What is participants' perception of the amount of incentive provided through the CCF project, and the method by which the funds were given to them?
- Did participants ever receive feedback about the research findings or how the information was utilized?

Goal 5:
Understand the impact that CCF funding has on equity and inclusion of diverse participants in city research.

- Does offering compensation to research participants increase the diversity of research participants across demographics (e.g., age, zip code, income level, race, gender, language spoken, etc.)?
- What was the demographic makeup of research participants before the CCF was established? What is it now?

Appendix B: Limitations of the Evaluation

Several factors limited recruitment and participation in this evaluation, affecting the breadth and depth of input from both City agency staff and gift card recipients.

- **For NYC agency staff interviews and surveys:** Our outreach was conducted based on the contact information provided by the staff member who completed the initial funding application. While we reached a majority of the staff who requested funds, some applicants were no longer available due to departures from City government or transitions to other agencies. In cases where we did not have contact information for any other researchers who took part in the project in question, we were unable to follow up.
- **For the gift card recipient survey**
 - **Indirect outreach:** We relied on the assistance of NYC agency staff to forward our survey requests to their gift card recipients, which was limited when staff were unavailable or unresponsive.
 - **Limited contact data:** Some projects did not collect – or collected only optional – contact information, making follow-up impossible. This was especially true for projects that utilized in-person convenience sampling as their recruitment channel.
 - **Language accessibility:** The survey was conducted solely in English, which may have discouraged gift card recipients who are more comfortable expressing themselves in a different language.
 - **Technology access:** The survey was offered only online and disseminated through email, which may have led to lower uptake from any gift card recipients who were less comfortable or less trusting of digital communications.
 - **Response caps:** The number of New Yorkers participating in CCF-funded projects varied widely, ranging from 5 to 200 participants. To ensure balance across project types and sizes, we limited the survey to 100 total respondents, allocating a set number per project proportionate to the number of participants involved in each project. This helped prevent over-representation from larger projects, but meant that not every interested participant who attempted to take the survey was able to do so.

Appendix C: Demographics of the gift card recipient survey

We received a total of **59** completed survey responses from gift card recipients. Of these, six responses were excluded from our analysis, as they were flagged as likely duplicates.

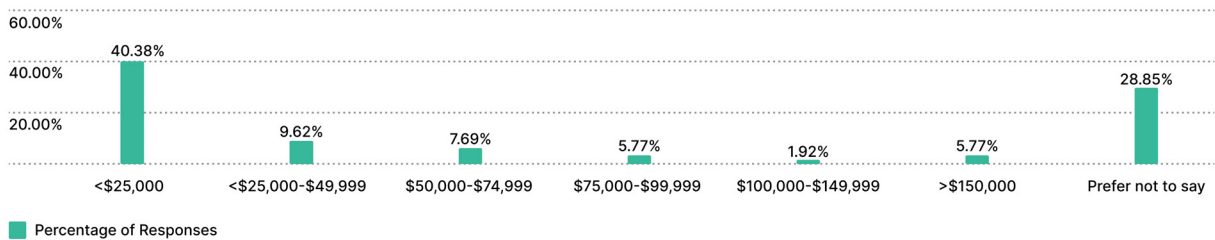
One was excluded as it was received after our survey window had formally closed.

Our analysis includes the remaining **52** responses. Across these 52 responses, we heard from New Yorkers who received gift cards for participating in **11** different projects.

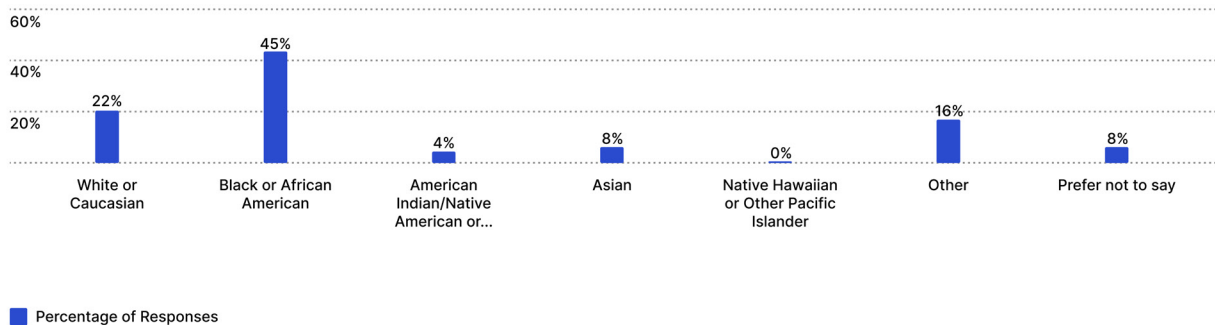
From these 52 responses, we observed the following demographics.

Please note that all demographic questions were optional for participants to respond to.

What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?



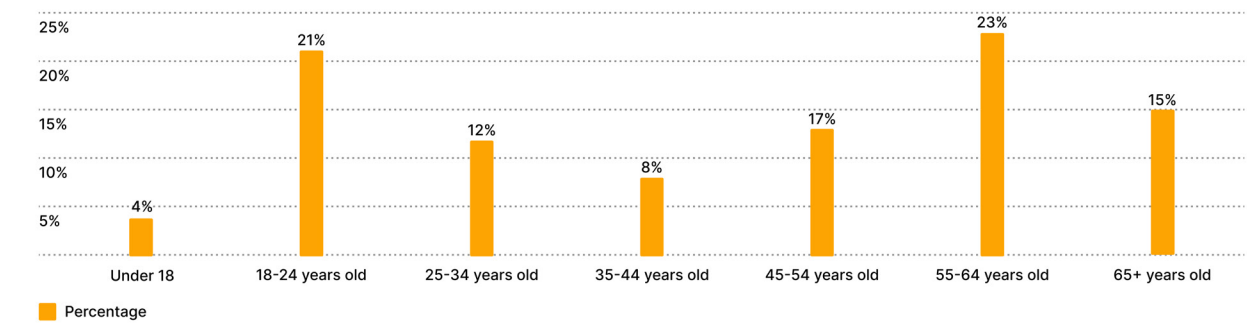
Racial Identity (select 1 or more)



Gender Identity



Age



Appendix D: Detailed Evaluation Insights

This appendix presents the complete set of insights gathered from our evaluation of the Community Compensation Fund (CCF) pilot. While key findings are summarized in the main report, this section offers a more in-depth examination of the experiences, challenges, and recommendations shared by City agency staff and participant researchers. These insights are intended to support other teams looking to design, implement, or refine similar community compensation programs.

Note: Since the CCF lacks data on research projects carried out by City agencies before receiving CCF funding, the findings on equity and inclusion of diverse participants are self-reported by staff conducting research at these agencies, relative to other projects in which they have been involved.

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1. Application and Administrative Processes

What worked and what could be improved in applying for and managing the Fund?

1.A: Agency teams found the application process straightforward and also used it to refine and improve their research plans.

Most agency teams described the application as “easy” and “straightforward.” While some noted minor redundancy between application questions, many appreciated how the application prompted them to think more deeply about their research design. In particular, teams reported that the evaluation criteria helped sharpen their project goals and methods.

Others also commented that the application itself was a valuable moment of reflection on the research process, sharing: “I really liked the prompts used in the initial form [CCF’s application] - just putting this initiative in wording for a third person helped shift how I think about the project and prioritize accountability.”

“And while I was submitting the application because of the questions it asked, it helped me come up with more ideas for the pilot program.”

“[The approval process was a] really helpful and important pause-point in the research prep process to ensure we are being thoughtful and trauma informed in our approach.”

Several respondents highlighted that, although the application process here requires project teams to confirm receipt of sign-off from team leadership – sometimes leading to internal delays – it has become more efficient with experience. Teams that had applied multiple times noted that subsequent applications took significantly less time.

Survey responses reinforced these findings, with most agency staff reporting that the application process was straightforward to use.

1.B: Uncertainty about evaluation criteria created hesitation among newer research teams

Despite its simplicity, the application surfaced a few recurring challenges. Some teams were uncertain how their projects would be assessed or what would be required during their project's implementation. **Less-experienced research teams expressed trepidation about applying if they did not meet all the criteria**, such as experience with facilitation and trauma-informed research. One team even reported proactively reviewing best practices around informed consent and anonymization to feel more prepared.

“There were some questions that I think was good that they were being asked, because it forced us to think about certain things that maybe we had assumed we were going to be doing.”

Survey respondents also suggested that a step-by-step visual guide outlining the full lifecycle of a CCF-supported project – from application to implementation – would help them navigate the process more confidently.

1.C: Teams tailored applications to maximize fit and funding likelihood

Several teams acknowledged that the CCF is a limited and valuable resource. As a result, **they reported intentionally requesting fewer funds or tailoring their applications to better match the evaluation criteria**. Some teams also revised their plans to better align with the CCF's priorities and evaluation standards, frequently collaborating across teams to incorporate colleagues with expertise in areas like facilitation or research design.

1.D: Agency teams found the CCF to be well-administered, flexible, and responsive to their needs

Respondents also praised the CCF team's responsiveness, noting that any questions they asked were answered quickly and clearly. Teams also valued the flexibility and adaptability of the CCF model. Many people preferred using gift cards over cash. They particularly appreciated the responsiveness of the CCF staff, noting how quickly they adapted to changing project needs. One team pointed out that the CCF team arranged for direct card deliveries to their office, which helped prevent delays and complications during the holiday season.

“Even being able to reach out to staff at ideas42 when we had a question, and I have to say I had an awesome experience, because I would receive a response quickly, and if a response wasn’t done quickly, at least it was no more than 2 or 3 days.”

1.E: Receiving physical gift cards is generally efficient, but teams have identified opportunities to enhance distribution transparency and logistics.

Once approved, applicants for physical gift cards initially had to pick them up in person at the ideas42 office in Lower Manhattan. While most found this straightforward, some early applicants had trouble finding the office, an issue that was resolved with clearer directions. However, **some applicants did not realize that the confirmation email they received after approval also included instructions for scheduling their gift card pickup.** As a result, important pickup details were missed. To address this, we updated the confirmation email to highlight these follow-up steps and make them easier to find, even when skimming.

Survey respondents also suggested that a broader selection of pickup dates and times (i.e., beyond the original once-weekly, two-hour window) would better accommodate the schedules of agency staff. Others proposed delivering physical gift cards directly to agency offices to eliminate the need for travel and scheduling altogether.

In response to this feedback, and as part of our efforts to prevent expiration issues related to storing unused cards (see 1.F for more details), we started testing direct delivery to City agencies in FY25. Since these changes were implemented, the process has improved significantly, and most teams now find it to be smoother and more convenient.

“The next steps were around the holidays to get the gift cards delivered. I remember there were a little bit of logistics there, because our project kicked off very early in January. But even that was really smooth and the cards were delivered to us here at our offices on time.”

1.F: Short expiration dates on physical cards create logistical hurdles

Teams issuing physical gift cards noted that expiration dates varied and were sometimes as short as one month. This created logistical challenges when gift cards expired before they could be distributed, which happened when research projects experienced unanticipated delays.

1.G: Digital gift card tracking lacks transparency for staff

Digital gift cards are distributed by project staff by entering the participant's email address into a digital form via Airtable. Tremendous, the digital gift card vendor, then automatically sends the participant an email with redemption instructions. Some City staff raised a few concerns surrounding this process. Specifically, some noted that once the digital gift card form was submitted, there was no built-in tracking to confirm whether their gift cards had been successfully delivered to participants. This left staff feeling unsure whether their distribution was successful.

Staff wanted to verify if participants had received the digital gift cards. While we can confirm when a recipient clicks the redemption link, current technical limitations (with Tremendous) prevent us from verifying whether a card has been fully claimed.

2. Implementation Support Needs

What do agencies need to carry out participatory research more effectively?

2.A: Staff need more time and personnel capacity to carry out participatory research

Overall, many teams emphasized that the funding provided by the CCF is a significant benefit when asked about capacity needs. However, as previously noted, many staff members indicated that conducting participatory research is not a typical part of their job. Therefore, when they do it, it requires time or manpower that their teams often cannot spare. **Teams identified this lack of bandwidth – whether in staff numbers or available time to plan, conduct, and analyze research – as a significant obstacle and a key area for growth in conducting more participatory research.**

“It would be great if we hired a consultant to spearhead this. Money also comes along with people power. It’s not just funding and, being able to hire someone outright to manage it and coordinate it.”

2.B: Staff desire additional training, tools, and guidance to strengthen their participatory research skills

Some staff members reported that their teams often engage in participatory research or have colleagues with research experience. However, many find this type of work unfamiliar or new.

Need for guidance on research methods

Although participating in the CCF helped enhance their understanding, they still seek further training and support in areas such as community engagement, participatory research methods, developing research plans, discovering and learning new tools, sharing knowledge with other researchers and practitioners, and understanding standard research metrics like sample sizes.

Several staff members requested readily accessible templates, such as sample consent language, to simplify project setup and compliance. Teams also emphasized the value of collaborative feedback sessions with the CCF team, where they could review draft materials (e.g., research plans or presentation decks) and receive input prior to launch.

“I personally don’t know of all the different methods or other ways we could have done it, besides the way that we were doing... I’m more interested in learning the different practices we could have done.”

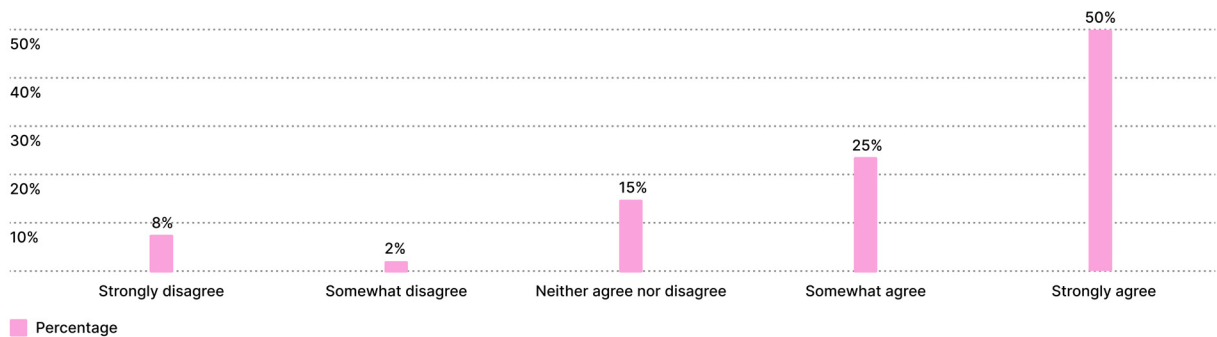
Desire for additional research resources

Respondents noted that their work could benefit from greater access to resources, such as technical platforms (e.g., Calendly, Zoom), transcription services, and existing participant pools. The CCF does not directly fund work in languages other than English, which limits the diversity and inclusivity of its projects. Enhancing translation access would help ensure projects represent the perspectives of New Yorkers who speak or prefer to communicate in languages other than English. Additionally, the CCF currently does not support initiatives to make research more accessible to New Yorkers with disabilities. **For both areas, the Community Compensation Fund could consider providing flexible funding that can be used as needed or directing City agency staff to other resources for improving accessibility, translating research materials, or recruiting additional researchers to increase capacity.**

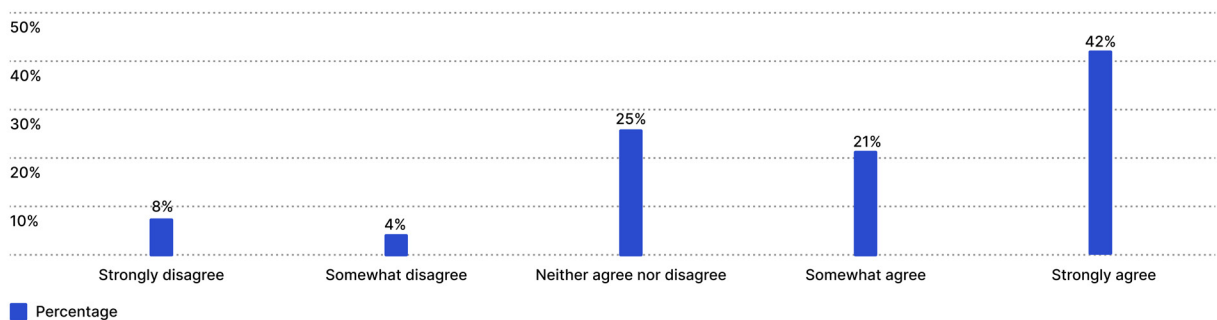
2.C: Ambiguity around compensation rates points to the need for updated guidance

Finally, staff also expressed a need for clearer guidance on the maximum request amount from the CCF and how much they should compensate staff for their specific projects, beyond the brief guidance currently provided in the application. Research staff noted that, although most recipients were happy to receive compensation, some expressed dissatisfaction with the amount they received. According to the survey, respondents generally felt positive about their experience with city participatory research. 63% agreed that the compensation was fair, while 12% disagreed. Additionally, 75% of respondents were satisfied with receiving payment via a Visa gift card, while 10% were not. Moreover, 83% indicated they would participate in future research activities with a City agency, with only 6% disagreeing. **This suggests that more guidance may be necessary for requesting teams to determine appropriate compensation levels. It might also be worth discussing regular adjustments for inflation.**

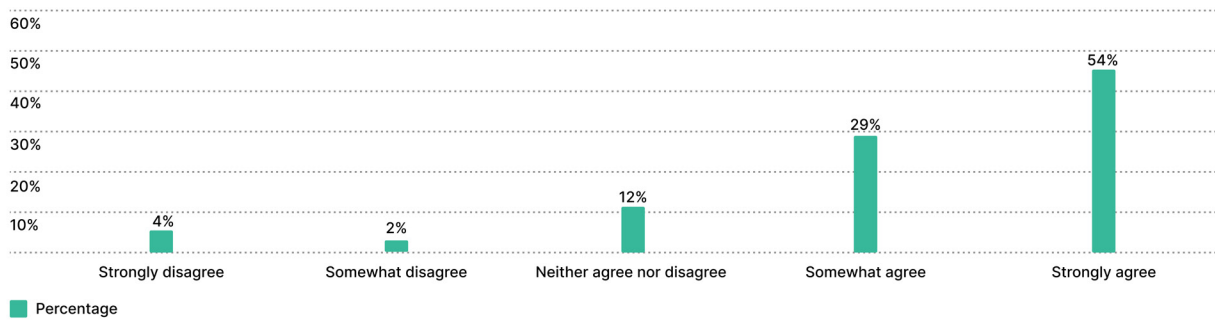
I was satisfied with getting my payment as a Visa gift card.



The compensation I received for participating was fair.



I would be willing to participate in another research project with a city agency.



3. Impact of the CCF on Research Practice

How did CCF participation influence agency workflows and project quality?

3.A: Despite strong support for participatory research and compensation, most staff have never been able to offer it before the CCF

Staff widely recognize the value of participatory research. Several noted that compensation is especially crucial for more time-consuming activities, such as focus groups. They expressed discomfort in conducting these activities without the ability to provide compensation.

“I would be very uncomfortable trying to set up a focus group without offering people incentives... the quality of that, would have been detrimental to the process.”

However, many noted that participatory research is not consistently included in project plans, job descriptions, or workflows. Many expressed a desire to incorporate participatory methods into every project **if given the capacity and structural support**. Similarly, while most staff strongly supported compensating participants, few had previously had the means to provide this support. A common challenge across teams was revealed: **even when funding is available, City agencies often lack accessible mechanisms to disburse compensation to New Yorkers**. Barriers included procurement restrictions, rules on incentives (even small gifts or food), and lengthy delays in fund disbursement.

“I don’t know if we’ve done anything like that before, and that’s something that I think is so important. Like, we’re in government. Just give people the material stuff if we can.”

3.B: Teams previously relied on inconsistent or less equitable forms of participant compensation

When asked about their experience with providing incentives, **many teams reported that, historically, they were unable to offer compensation or were limited to smaller dollar incentives or promotional items, such as branded merchandise, for participants.** Other teams mentioned that they have or would ask partnering community-based organizations or nonprofits to fund participatory research activities.

“General challenges around procurement make it really hard for us to get the resources we need, when we need them, which, just to skip ahead, is why the CCF is such an incredible resource.”

3.C: The CCF encourages City agencies to conduct participatory research, and they want to do more

Without access to CCF and its incentives for participatory research, many teams conducted research projects sporadically, relying on staff capacity and existing funds. However, some respondents shared **that the availability of CCF funds and the chance to compensate participants motivated City teams to start new research projects.** These City agencies believed they would have been less likely to pursue similar research without ongoing CCF support due to concerns about budget limitations or a lack of alternative funding sources. After their experience with the CCF, teams are eager to pursue more participatory research in the future. City agency staff hope for the CCF to continue and plan to do more participatory projects, supported by the Fund’s ongoing assistance. One interviewee mentions that the CCF makes compensation a “default standard” in research, something that might not otherwise be achievable.

“[The CCF] makes it possible for us to say that this is a default standard for us... I think we just wouldn’t feel comfortable committing to doing this, which is a real shame, because the

input is what's important... this just makes it so much more possible, and makes us feel much better about the way that we do our inside process.”

3.D: Without the CCF, many research projects would have been less robust, or not conducted at all

Many City teams shared that, without access to the CCF, their research projects would have looked very different, and in some cases, might not have happened at all.

Many respondents indicated that without CCF funds, they might still have pursued their research projects, but with certain compromises or barriers that the CCF helped them to avoid. For example, without CCF support, teams expected to forgo participant incentives, which could have made recruitment more difficult and led to lower participation. Additionally, without CCF funding, they might have had to interview a different, potentially less relevant group or limit the scope of their activities.

“I guess we would have had to pivot [without the CCF]... I think maybe the population that we interviewed maybe would have changed, and I do think that it would not have been as fruitful to not interview them.”

Beyond enabling research, staff shared that the CCF is actively enhancing the quality and intentionality of their research design. Teams reported that the application process itself encouraged deeper reflection on their research goals, methods, and inclusion strategies. Some showed interest in exploring more creative or unconventional feedback collection methods, indicating a shift in how City agencies approach community engagement. Lastly, some teams, particularly those working with community organizations, highlighted **that they couldn't have their research without CCF funding.**

3.E: City staff consider participatory research essential to grounding their work in community perspectives

When asked about the importance or impact of participatory research in general on their work, City agency staff consistently described participatory research as a critical tool for capturing real-world

perspectives that traditional desk research often misses or oversimplifies.

“Our work would be incomplete if we actually didn’t get feedback from people. We spent a lot of time doing desk research, and I feel like so much is missed without actually speaking to folks. It’s such a wonderful opportunity to validate or add on information.”

Staff emphasize the importance of customizing programs to fit local contexts. They also emphasize that **participatory research is a vital method for understanding the changes or enhancements necessary to ensure a program or service effectively serves all segments of the target population.**

“...the intervention that works in East New York isn’t going to be the right intervention in the South Bronx. I think the really transformative work for us has been to be able to go out and talk to people and be able to validate... It’s gotten us to really broaden our conception of what constitutes evidence...”

3.F: CCF-funded research led to immediate program or process improvements and informed long-term planning

Staff used CCF funding for various projects, including website testing, pilot program development, feedback collection, and needs assessments. They shared that this research helped them challenge assumptions about how their programs and services are actually delivered. It highlighted issues such as the curse of knowledge (i.e., the mistaken belief that everyone understands the same information, as seen in the overuse of unfamiliar acronyms in some projects). Feedback generally fell into several main categories: preferences for service locations, accessibility needs for communication, understanding of written materials, expansion of programs, and the usability of new technology introduced by the City.

Staff were generally open to implementing most of the feedback from their participatory research. Adjustments could be made more quickly for projects evaluating existing programs or testing tangible products, such as communications. However, respondents noted that more significant

changes would require additional time for planning and assessing their feasibility.

“When I think about the... program, we were able to implement things right on the spot... I was like, what are these people asking for? It’s not impossible. This is doable.

“There are some immediate things that are quick fixes, that are just a matter of how we approach our work. The other stuff, I would say, we’re still trying to figure it out.”

4. Equity and Inclusion

How did the CCF help teams include more diverse participants?

4.A: The CCF enables more equitable and community-centered research practices, encouraging and facilitating City agencies to reach new populations.

As noted in 3.D, removing logistical barriers and establishing a reliable, legal way to compensate participants enabled the CCF to promote more inclusive and ethical research. For example, some agencies admitted to regularly sampling participants from their existing contacts – people they already knew or whose stories they could easily access. Sometimes, this was due to limited staff capacity to conduct in-depth research, or because feedback was mainly collected through touchpoints integrated into the agency’s workflow, such as feedback surveys after interactions, which captured the experiences of only those already aware of and engaging with the agency’s services.

Although some teams were worried that incentives might bias research results, experience showed this was not the case. In fact, providing gift cards through the CCF **helped teams recruit a broader and more diverse group of New Yorkers** by intentionally considering factors such as age, race, income, and neighborhood when setting quotas and recruitment plans. Several teams observed that **offering compensation enabled broader participation, attracting a more diverse group than they could typically reach, and sometimes allowed agencies to extend beyond their usual target populations.**

“We had a lot of back and forth about whether being upfront about offering compensation was going to skew the participants. We found that we were reaching a really diverse group of folks and letting people know that there was compensation available was just making that more possible, not less.”

“We were mindful about making sure we got a diverse sample... We tried to make sure that we got a wide variety of people, so that they could all be involved in the decision making process.”

“Working with CCF has absolutely enabled our team to get meaningful insights from New Yorkers in an ethical way.”

Thanks to CCF funding, these teams began gathering input from residents they had previously not engaged, broadening their perspectives and experiences, including reaching New Yorkers unfamiliar with their agency or programs. Offering participation compensation eased the recruitment process, encouraged underrepresented voices, and showed respect for community knowledge.

By reducing financial barriers, the CCF has made participatory research more accessible to underrepresented and hard-to-reach groups.

“We really wanted to get at both, the people that we serve, and then the population that we don’t serve... because it was a really hefty survey. The \$50 gift cards were a big incentive for them.”

4.B: Equitable participant recruitment remains a challenge, though CBO partnerships help

Ongoing barriers to equitable recruitment

City staff acknowledge **persistent sampling biases**, like teams not fully translating their activities or relying on convenience sampling for recruitment. They also highlight the need for guidance to **ensure equitable outreach and distribution**. Additionally, for some teams funded by CCF, participatory research methods and the questions posed through the CCF application are less familiar or less typical in their usual research routines.

“You know, this is a community that is almost entirely people of color, predominantly low income, many of whom speak languages other than English. We worked to achieve diversity in terms of our participants, but I’m not sure [we achieved it]...”

Strategies and support through CBO partnerships

To address these issues, City teams used various strategies to recruit participants and distribute gift cards fairly. These included:

- Participant recruitment strategies
 - Collaborating with other agencies
 - Aiming for a diverse sample, including non-participants
 - Consulting with legal departments
 - Identifying under-served locations based on past data
 - Sending mass communications
 - Setting up tables in public areas
 - Trying to reach different neighborhoods
 - Using convenience sampling and posting near offices
 - Making participation as easy as possible
 - Working with community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Gift card distribution strategies
 - Randomly drawing numbers
 - Waiting until an activity ends to hold a raffle for fair distribution

- Following up after the raffle to confirm eligibility
- Matching digital or physical testing to the type of card offered

However, several teams noted that time constraints forced them to rely on convenience sampling. This sometimes resulted in unintentional bias in participant demographics.

“[We had] unintentional bias with our participants. A lot of them are people who work in the financial district or students. We need to figure out how to do better research since we’re doing convenience sampling.”

To mitigate this challenge, some teams worked with community-based organizations (CBOs), which was particularly valuable when the CBO had a strong relationship with the intended communities. Still, teams reported occasional challenges when CBO partners overestimated their capacity or couldn’t follow through on recruitment support.

5. Value of Participant Compensation

Why compensation matters and what staff learned about offering it.

5.A: City staff consider participant compensation ethically necessary and a sign of respect for participants’ time and expertise

Most staff we interviewed believed that compensating participants is a matter of fairness. They viewed research participation as labor (e.g., offering valuable expertise that takes time away from other responsibilities) and therefore considered it deserving of clear recognition. Consequently, City staff viewed compensation not just as a recruitment tool but as a strong expression of values. Since it is common for governments to solicit public input without offering anything in return, **providing compensation to New Yorkers involved in their work felt like a meaningful sign of respect and appreciation.**

“They’re working, so they deserve the compensation. A lot of folks we interviewed have their own lives and their own work, so they are taking time away from the things that they’re doing.”

Several also noted that, **without compensation, participatory research risks becoming extractive** and harmful to the communities it is intended to serve, particularly when soliciting the input of less often represented marginalized groups.

“If we don’t provide compensation, research becomes an extractive process, especially because we are working with historically marginalized communities.”

5.B: Compensation boosts participation and can deepen engagement, though its effects vary

City teams widely believed that providing compensation increased participants’ interest in their project. Several staff members observed that **for some participants, compensation was the primary motivator**, while others would have joined anyway but appreciated the gesture as a sign of respect.

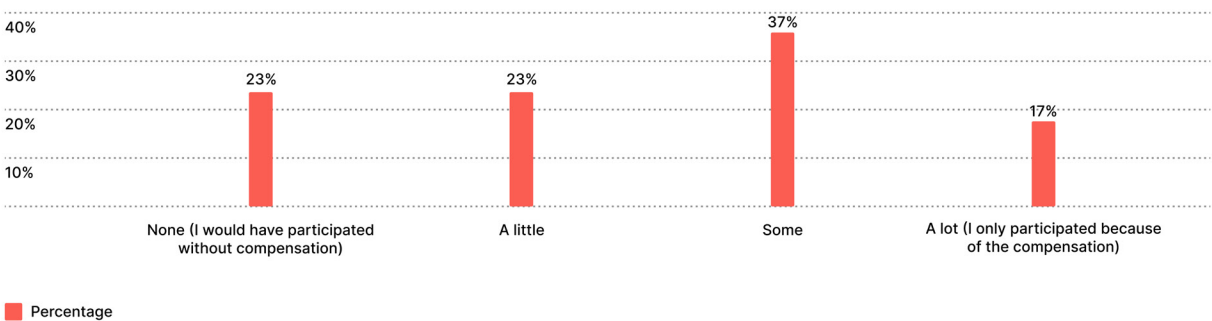
The participant survey reinforced these observations:

- **77% of respondents stated that the compensation influenced their willingness to participate in the research.**

Of these:

- **17% stated they participated solely because of the gift card**, and
- **23%** said they would have participated regardless of the incentive.

How much did the gift card impact your willingness to participate in the research activity?



Beyond increasing turnout, some (though not all) staff report that compensation also led to more enthusiastic and open engagement. One team reported better follow-through in completing surveys;

other teams noted that time-intensive research activities (enabled by compensation) allowed participants to share richer insights.

“If I’m comparing it to how we received feedback before with the online survey, a lot of it was very short feedback. But because we had people come in and they knew they would get compensation, the feedback we got was so rich. And they shared so much.”

Another staff member reflected that even participants motivated solely by compensation still provided useful input:

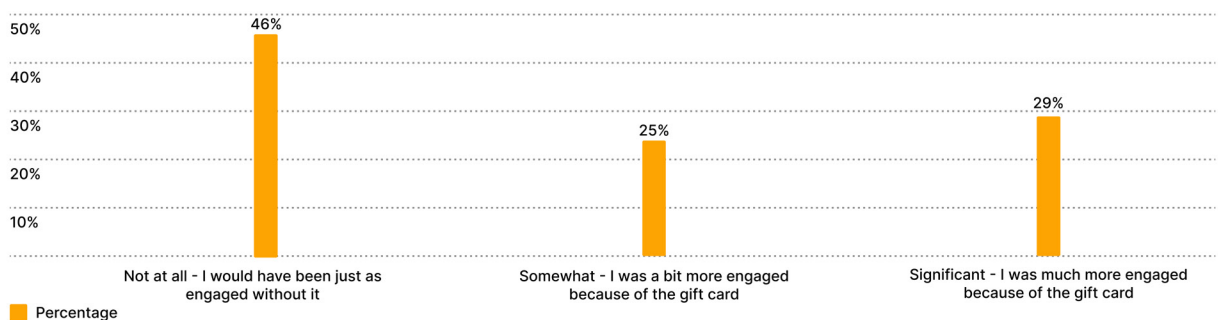
“I think we definitely got people who were only interested in the gift card, but we still got valuable information from them.”

However, not all participants felt that compensation influenced their level of engagement:

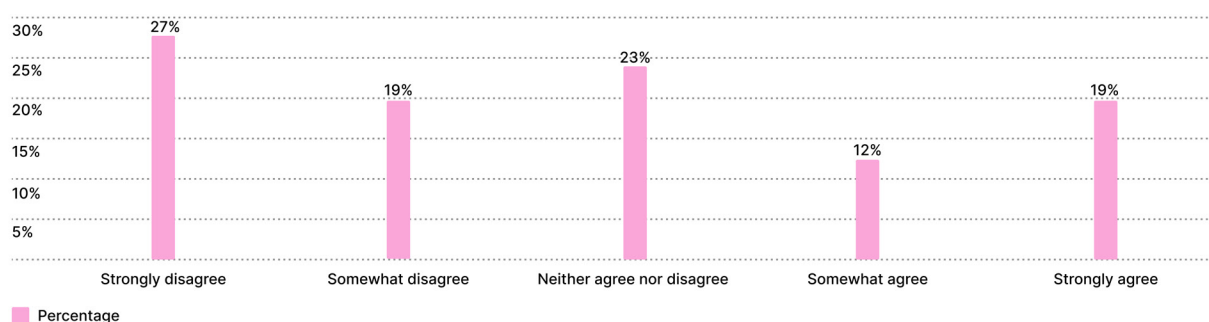
- 46% reported that compensation did not affect their engagement
- 25% felt *somewhat* more engaged
- 29% felt *significantly* more engaged

Regarding whether compensation influenced their sharing, 46% disagreed and 31% agreed. These mixed results suggest that although compensation is important in attracting people, its impact on engagement levels may vary depending on the context, format, and individual motivations.

How much did receiving the gift cad affect how engaged you were in the activity?



Receiving compensation influenced the type or amount of information I was willing to share with the City?

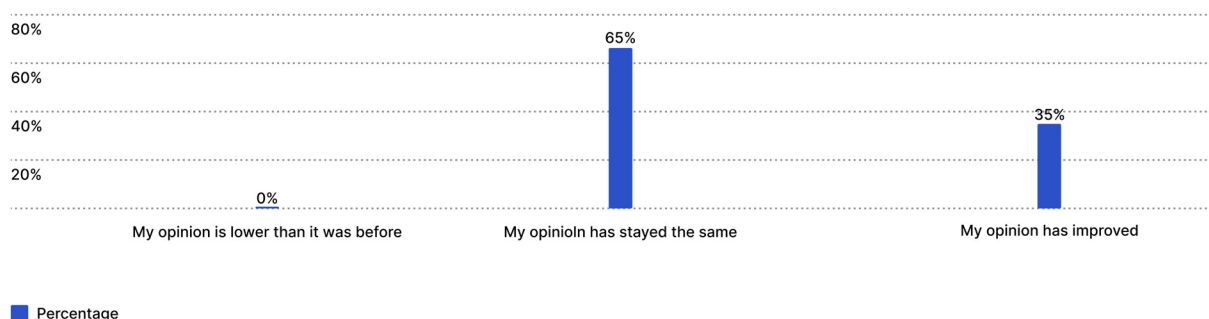


5.C: Participatory research created positive experiences with government but also raised expectations

Agency research teams reported that participatory research provided a unique opportunity to foster positive interactions between community members and the local government. Staff observed that participants often felt respected and valued, and were pleasantly surprised to be directly involved, especially when it included compensation. This finding was confirmed by the participant survey, which showed that **35% of respondents felt their opinion of the government had improved** due to their involvement in the CCF-funded participatory research. However, it's important to recognize that participants' broader views of government shape their perceptions and engagement throughout the research process.

“I think people feel more respected... It’s rare that government engages with communities and is also able to be like, ‘we’re going to compensate you for engaging with us.’”

After taking part in this research project, how has your opinion of New York City government changed?



Overall, feedback was highly positive. City staff noted that participants are eager to receive payments, and teams shared stories of gift card use, ranging from paying for dental surgery and purchasing items not covered by SNAP benefits to funding a family member's birthday meal or transportation.

At the same time, staff acknowledged potential risks. When testing products or services that are far from public launch, **City staff feared that they were generating false excitement or setting expectations that might not be met.**

5.D: The CCF has begun generating cross-agency enthusiasm for participatory research, but structural support must catch up

City staff reported overwhelmingly positive responses to participant compensation from community members, partner organizations, and leadership alike. Offering participant compensation was widely seen not only as fair but as a meaningful step toward more respectful and reciprocal engagement.

Agency leadership teams generally supported participatory research funded by the CCF.

In some instances, leaders encouraged teams to participate and welcomed the integration of community input. Many staff described a ripple effect: after sharing their CCF experience, colleagues in other departments became excited and often asked how to get involved or apply.

“It’s kind of nice to be the person that gets to share the link to the application, to be honest.”

Partner organizations were similarly eager to collaborate, especially when compensation could support community engagement in new initiatives. However, in practice, some partners struggled to participate meaningfully due to limited internal capacity, even when they were initially enthusiastic.

Meanwhile, some agency teams described structural or logistical hurdles that made participatory research difficult to implement in practice. They expressed a desire for stronger systems, clearer expectations, and more institutional backing to make these practices routine rather than exceptional.

Several interviewees emphasized the **need for a cultural shift across City agencies, where participatory research and community input are not optional, but expected components of the design and decision-making process.**

“What I would really like is for policymakers to say, ‘But what was the community input on this process?’... What I want to see is that sea of change, where folks are like, ‘This is a default must in your process.’”

Some teams are already taking steps in that direction. A few are actively seeking alternative or private funding to support future participatory work. Others mentioned plans to prioritize participatory methods more consistently in upcoming projects.

6. The Role and Experience of Peer Researchers

Benefits and challenges of the peer researcher program in community engagement.

6.A: Participant researchers improve research quality by bringing cultural competency that City teams may lack

Peer researchers played a crucial role in improving the quality and depth of the research. By leveraging their lived experience and shared background with the communities they worked with, **peer researchers have been able to foster trust, boost participation, and collect more genuine, meaningful feedback than might otherwise have been possible.**

“When people relate to people, resonate with people, they’re more inclined to chime in and participate.”

“Their lived experience was crucial in designing research instruments in ways that...resonated with the participants. They also were instrumental in conducting outreach.”

Peer researchers act as a bridge between the community’s cultural context and the City agency team, helping to shape not only what questions were asked but also how, when, and by whom.

“No one on our core project team had experience of incarceration or was justice impacted. We found that to be a big gap. I don’t

think we would have been able to do what we did without [them] being there.”

“Being able to hire contractors through this process was key in implementing participatory strategies and building evidence to implement programs and broaden economic opportunities.”

This experience highlights the unique value of involving contractors with lived experience, especially when City teams are engaging with communities they are not part of or projects peer researchers have themselves been participants in. Doing so can make research not only more rigorous and relevant but also more ethical and respectful.

“It made a huge difference to our interviewees to have interviewers who look like them and can relate to the specific experiences of being a man of color in New York City.”

Like some of the projects the CCF supported with gift cards, some projects with peer researchers would not have taken place without the CCF.

6.B: Limited integration of participant researchers hindered collaboration, highlighting the need for better onboarding and access

For one PR, although they made valuable contributions, they and their supervisor recognized challenges caused by not being fully integrated into the agency’s workflow. The PR was not part of regular meetings and did not have access to the team’s file-sharing system, which often left them out of sync with project updates. This hampered their ability to contribute proactively and collaborate effectively. **The PR also mentioned that their role required flexibility to accommodate community members’ schedules, often outside regular business hours. As a part-time worker without full institutional support, this flexibility became a burden.** The key lesson: PRs need access to communication tools, regular meetings, and clear expectations regarding scheduling. Without these, skilled contractors face barriers that hinder their ability to support the research.

As one supervisor noted, one solution to increase depth of partnership with PRs, outside of just

a longer timeline for the engagement, might be structured, personal check-ins to catch issues or concerns early.

6.C: Lack of a clear post-engagement pathway or support

One PR shared that while the CCF opportunity was meaningful, there was no clear path for continued work after their project ended. They noted a sharp drop in income once their engagement concluded, highlighting the need for future programs to **focus not just on short-term participation but also on long-term sustainability and career development.**

Supervisors and PRs alike emphasized the importance of being recognized as integral team members, not just temporary contributors. As one supervisor reflected:

“...it’s also important for the whole team to understand why that person is on the team, to see them as a core team member. There’s probably more team education and awareness building that’s important...”

This highlights a dual responsibility: **teams need to intentionally plan for integrating PRs into their workflows and culture, while funders should create programs that support both the experience and career growth of PRs beyond individual projects.** Effectively embedding PRs within teams not only enhances their sense of belonging but also sets the stage for broader adoption of lived-experience roles in future City research and engagement initiatives.

6.D: Need for supervisor support

One supervisor noted the difficulty of meeting the deadlines for submitting invoices to the Community Compensation Fund team.

“I struggled sometimes to get the peer researchers to submit invoices unless they did it in person with my assistance...”

Supervisors also reported a desire for more guidance on how contractors should track hours and for context of what past projects have requested from or supported through the CCF.

7. Looking Forward: Scaling, Sustainability, and Visibility

Considerations for expanding or adapting the model.

7.A: Increasing awareness of the CCF will broaden its impact

While agency staff who used the CCF reported positive experiences, many noted that the Fund remains relatively unknown across City government. Several recommended more direct outreach, especially to agencies already involved in community-facing work aligned with equitable research principles. Increasing visibility would help more teams access CCF support and make participatory research a common practice across the City.

7.B: Additional project funding would strengthen equity and participation

Staff noted that the Fund's current compensation limitations (both in total project support and per-participant compensation) can be constraining. In some cases, teams resorted to raffles instead of guaranteed gift cards to stay within budget while attempting to incentivize participation.

Greater flexibility and increased funding per project would allow teams to:

- Compensate every participant equitably
- Avoid using raffles or partial incentives
- Design more ambitious or time-intensive participatory research efforts
- Offer fairer compensation rates aligned with the time and expertise required

This shift would enhance both the **distributive equity** and the **quality** of research outcomes.

7.C: Supporting teams with varied experience levels will improve research quality

Throughout interviews and surveys, staff described varying levels of comfort and experience with participatory research. Some teams were seasoned practitioners, while others were new to this type of research. The CCF is well-equipped to address this range by offering additional guidance, training, or peer learning opportunities, ensuring that all teams can undertake their projects with confidence and effectiveness.

7.D: Sharing what we learn will strengthen the case for participatory research

Currently, findings from CCF-supported projects are scattered across individual teams. Staff suggested that consolidating and sharing insights from the entire Fund could highlight the value of participatory approaches and show how New Yorkers have influenced the design and delivery of City programs.

By **disseminating collective findings**, the CCF could:

- Help build a stronger case for participatory research within City government
- Highlight the real-world impact of community input
- Inspire replication and adaptation across agencies

Appendix E: Similar Funds and Models

At the time of writing, the Community Compensation Fund team has identified a number of programs and models used to compensate community members participating in research led by non-profits as well as local, state, and federal government agencies. The following list shares those that we are aware of. Many of these were surfaced through Sunita Ram's U.S. Digital Response blog post "[Navigating the sticky web of research compensation.](#)"

Note: We recognize this list is not exhaustive. Other funds and models are surely in operation, and we welcome hearing about them.

Please reach out to ccf@ideas42.org to share additional examples.

- The Washington State Office of Equity, in partnership with Uncommon Bridges: [Final report](#)
- The Office of Equity and Social Justice in King County, WA, in partnership with Root Cause Equity Consulting: [Website](#)
- The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA): [Website](#)
- The Delta Institute: [Website](#)
- Digital and Data Services of San Francisco, CA, in partnership with Civic Makers: [Website](#)
- Guilford County, NC: [Procedures](#)
- Saint Paul, MN: [Legislation proposed and adopted in 2022](#)
- Ontario Public Service, in Ontario, Canada: [User research guide](#)
- National Institute for Justice: [Incentives review protocol](#), [Participant support costs and incentives](#)
- Technology Transformation Services, U.S. General Services Administration: [Website](#)

The CCF was also contacted by a team from Philadelphia, PA's local government working on developing a similar fund.

