

RFQ Info Session

Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground



van cortlandt
park alliance

DESIGN TRUST
FOR PUBLIC SPACE

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A photograph of a paved path in a park, likely Van Cortlandt Park. The path is paved with asphalt and has a black metal fence running along its edge. A small sign is visible on the fence. The area is surrounded by dense green trees and bushes. The lighting suggests it is a sunny day.

Van Cortlandt Park is home to an Enslaved African Burial Ground that was officially acknowledged and named by NYC Parks on Juneteenth in 2021.

The Opportunity

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, in partnership with the Design Trust for Public Space, is launching a “design ideas competition,” seeking architects, landscape architects, artists, or other qualified firms and individuals to submit qualifications to reimagine the Enslaved African Burial Ground in Van Cortlandt Park. Three winners will be selected who can help unlock ideas and visions for the site that center healing, memory, and imagination. These ideas will catapult the project into its next phases, creating momentum for a new memorial that can serve its community for generations to come.

Project Context

Van Cortlandt Park is home to an Enslaved African Burial Ground that was officially acknowledged and named by NYC Parks on Juneteenth in 2021, due to the efforts of Van Cortlandt Park Alliance and the Enslaved People Project. Located along the eastern edge of the Kingsbridge Burial Ground, this area has been identified as a likely burial site of enslaved Africans who lived, worked, and died on the Van Cortlandt family plantation. They were responsible for its functions and economic gains for over a hundred years. According to records, there were several Indigenous people who were enslaved as well.

While NYC Parks recognized the Enslaved African Burial Ground with signage and fencing, the space remains largely unmarked. With generous funding from the Mellon Foundation, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance has partnered with the Design Trust for Public Space and Liminal sp to create a community-led process to imagine how a memorial or project of memory, might help to tell the story of these Enslaved people and to lift up the Bronx community for generations.



1870s

Pre-park history, 1870s construction workers unearthed skeletons near lake.

2019

*VCPA Enslaved People created the Enslaved People Project, bringing together a coalition of experts, the Descendant Community Stakeholders.

**USDA conducted study w/ ground-penetrating radar, identifying what appear to be coffins and interment.*

2021

*Official naming of Enslaved African Burial Ground and Hester & Piero's Mill Pond, at VCPA's first annual Juneteenth Celebration in the park in partnership with Bronx Arts Ensemble.

**Juneteenth taken place 2021-2024*

2023

*Introduced inaugural Pinkster Festival, in partnership with Van Cortlandt House Museum. Programmed by Chief Baba Neil Clarke & Lavada Nahon.

**Preliminary design plan for Daylighting Tibbetts Brook/Putnam Greenway extension (NYC's largest green infrastructure project approved by Public Design Commission*

2025

*Selection of Design Trust for Public Space in collaboration with Immanuel Oni of Liminal sp.



1980s

Headstones at Kingsbridge Burial Ground removed by NYC Parks.

2019

Artist Kamau Ware (Black Gotham Experience) debuted, "Sugar Shadow", a photography exhibit at Van Cortlandt Golf House.

2020

Formation of the Enslaved People Project Task Force; Funding provided by Bronx Community Board 8 to create a free curriculum for elementary and middle school students.

**VCPA worked in partnership with VCHM and Kingsbridge Historical Society.*

2022

Grant Award from NYS Senator Alessandra Biaggi for interpretive signage at the burial ground and surrounding areas. Contract with NYS Dormitory Authority is in process.

Students Uplifting Ancestral Spaces (SUAS) Lehman College VCP African burial ground stewards

2023

Baobab Tree Installation near the burial ground. Ghana-born, Bronx artist Tijay Mohammed, with Beam Center, installed 18' temporary sculpture: Baobab Tree of Life.

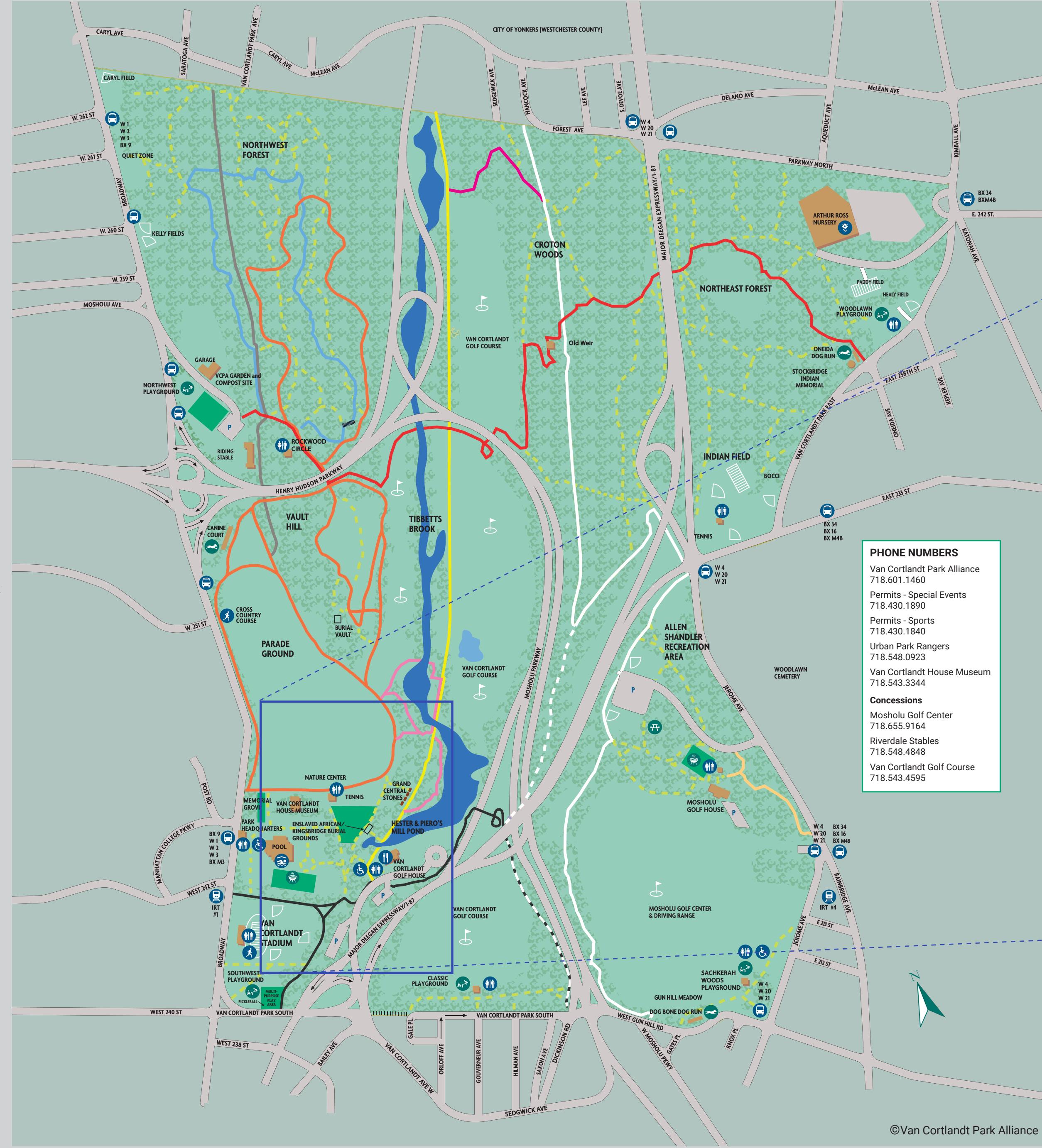
2024

Grant received by Mellon Foundation for Reimagining the Burial Ground. VCPA issues RFP for project management services.

VCPA / Ashley Hart Adams develops new curriculum: *Unearthing the Past/Building the Future*.

Map

Van Cortlandt Park



Engagement - Legacy Council



Engagement - Legacy Council

This project's process is being guided by a group of neighbors, descendants, community organizations and artists known as the Legacy Council. The Legacy Council members have been meeting throughout the past 9 months to workshop values and vision for the future memorial. They have also visited memorials around the city to discuss design and materials. The Legacy Council has collectively agreed that it should be a space that recognizes the emotional weight it holds for many guests and fosters spiritual practice and ancestral reverence. It should be easily usable and accessible, inviting deep engagement from anyone interested. It should be an honest resource for history and storytelling, and it should include connection to nature and the physical environment.

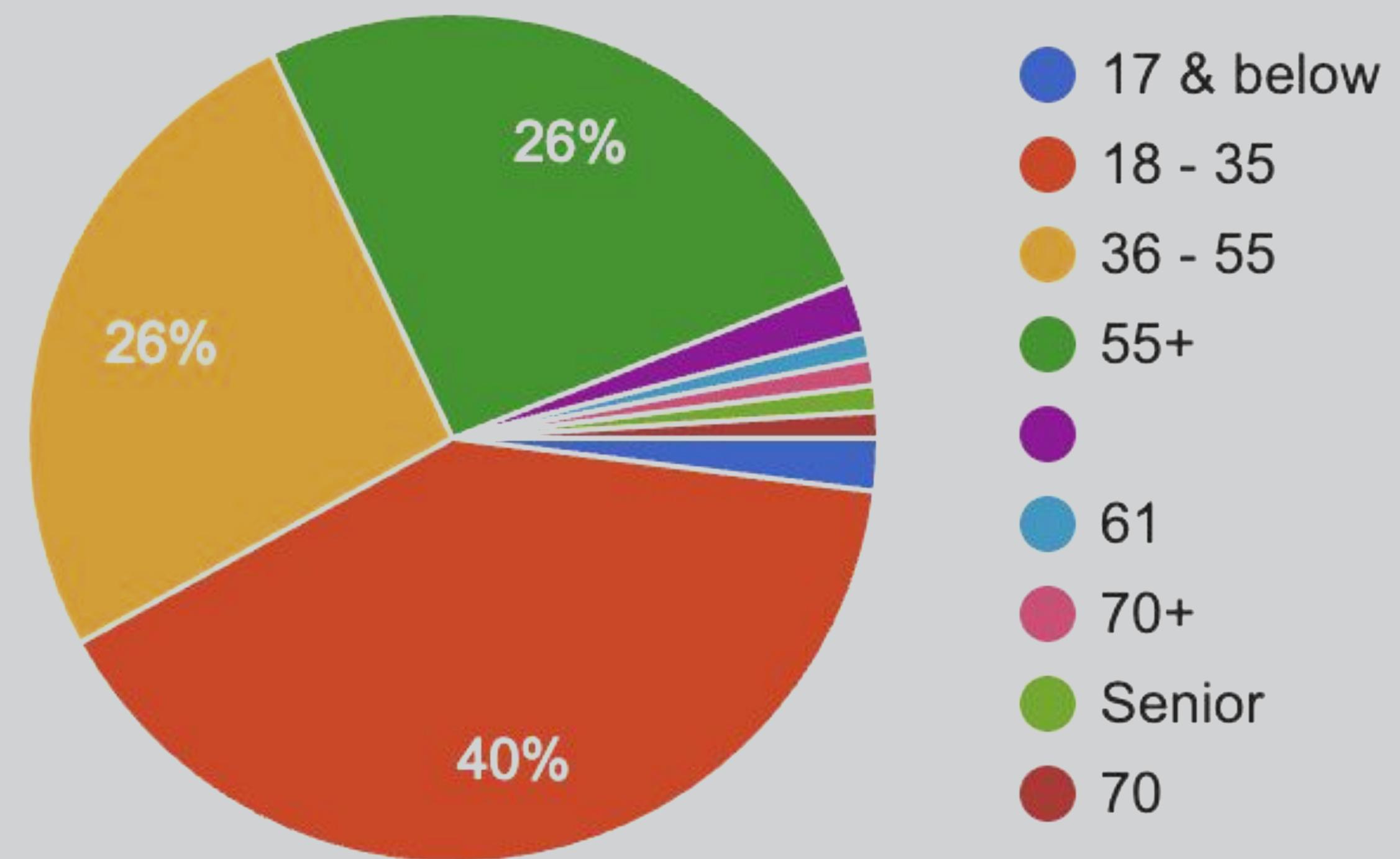
Engagement - Community Survey

Over 115 responses were collected over the past 5 months. Outreach took place at park events, such as the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance's Juneteenth celebration and at a series of meaningful activations throughout the summer and fall at the burial ground.

Goals of Survey

- **Center Community Voices**
- **Gather Design Inspiration**
- **Inform the Design Ideas Competition**
- **Understand Community Connection**
- **Build Long-Term Relationships**
- **Highlight Educational & Cultural Needs**

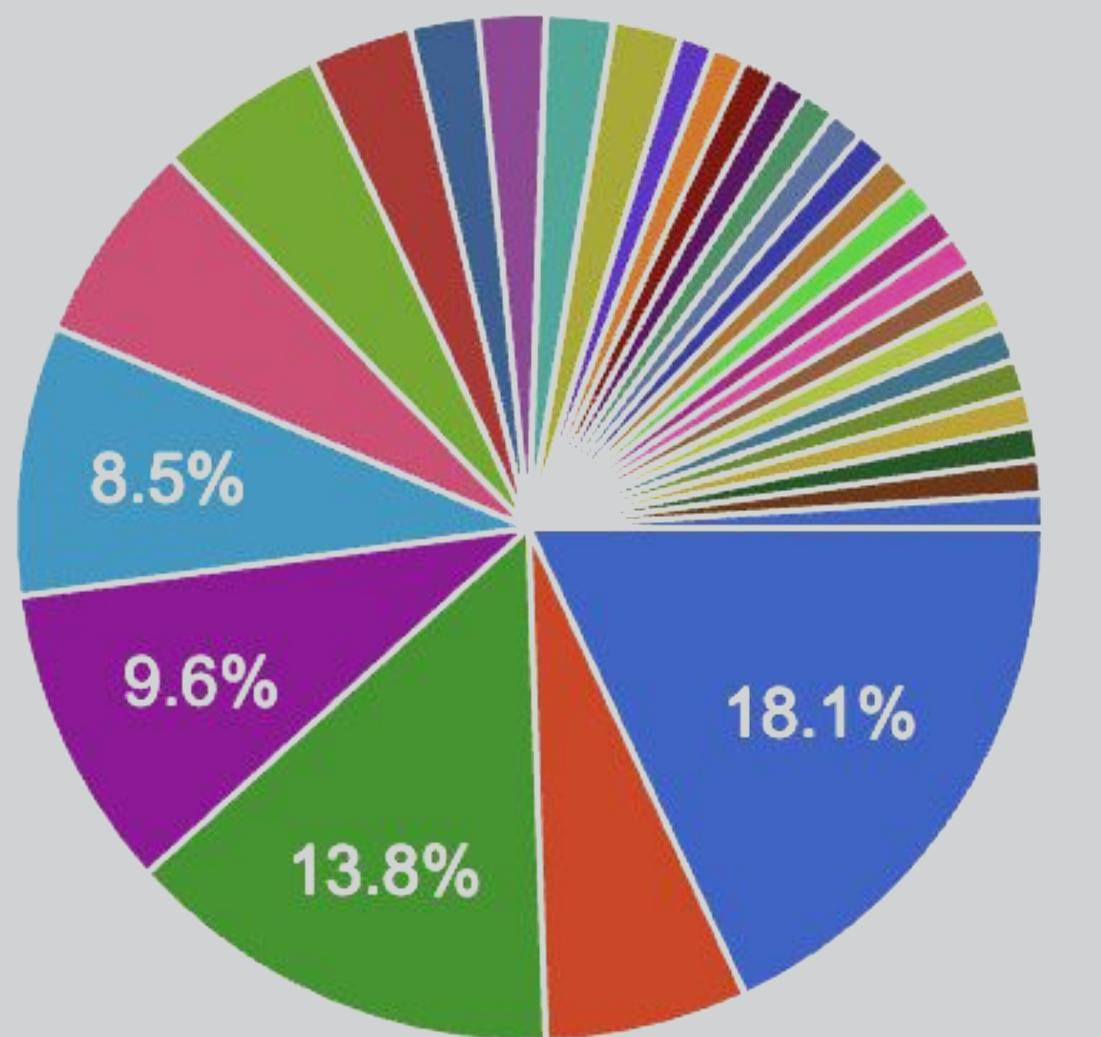
Age Groups (100 Responses)



Geographies

Zip Code

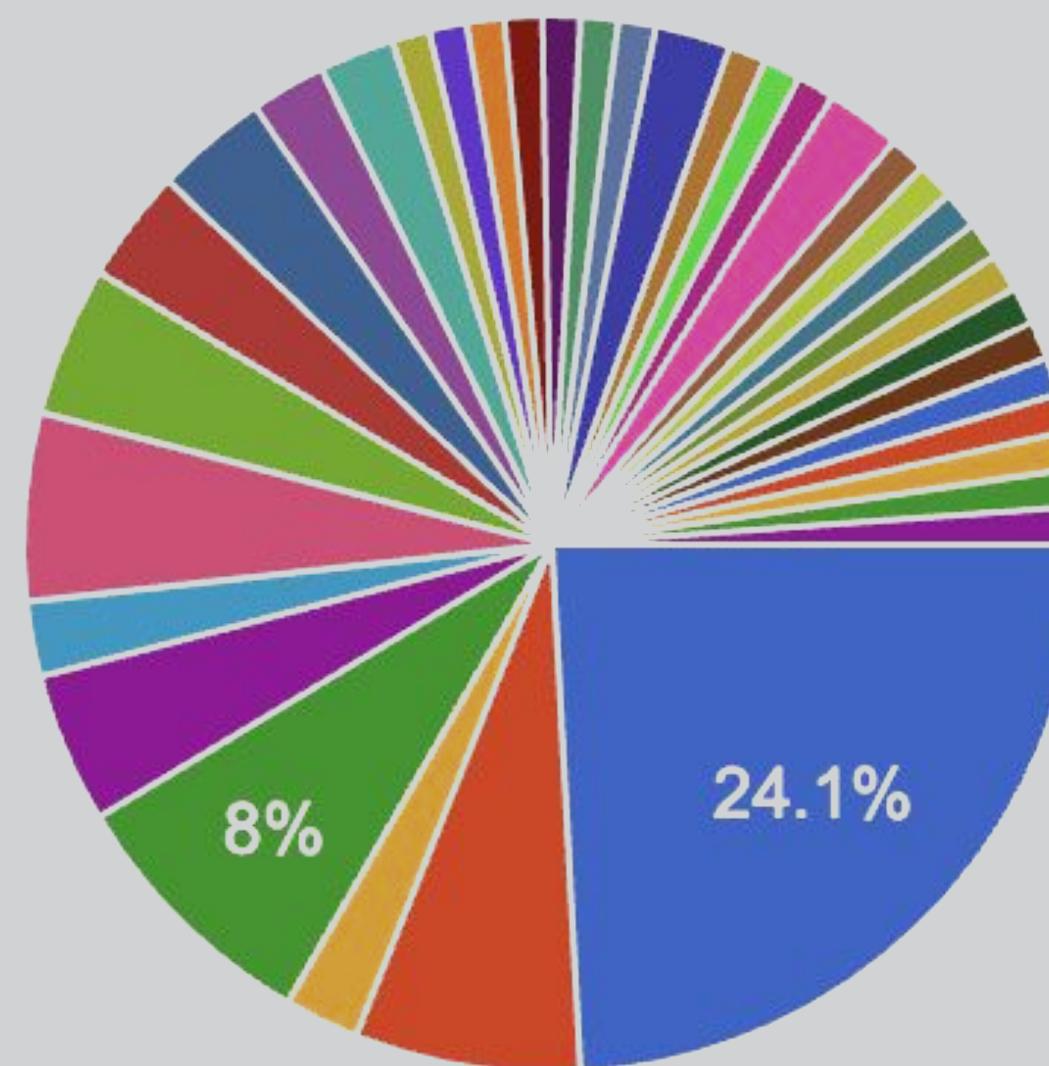
94 responses



- 10463
- 10467
- 10470
- 10471
- 10708
- 10033
- 10458
- 10466
- 10468
- 10031
- 10462
- 10453
- 11365
- 10040
- 10705

Neighborhood

87 responses

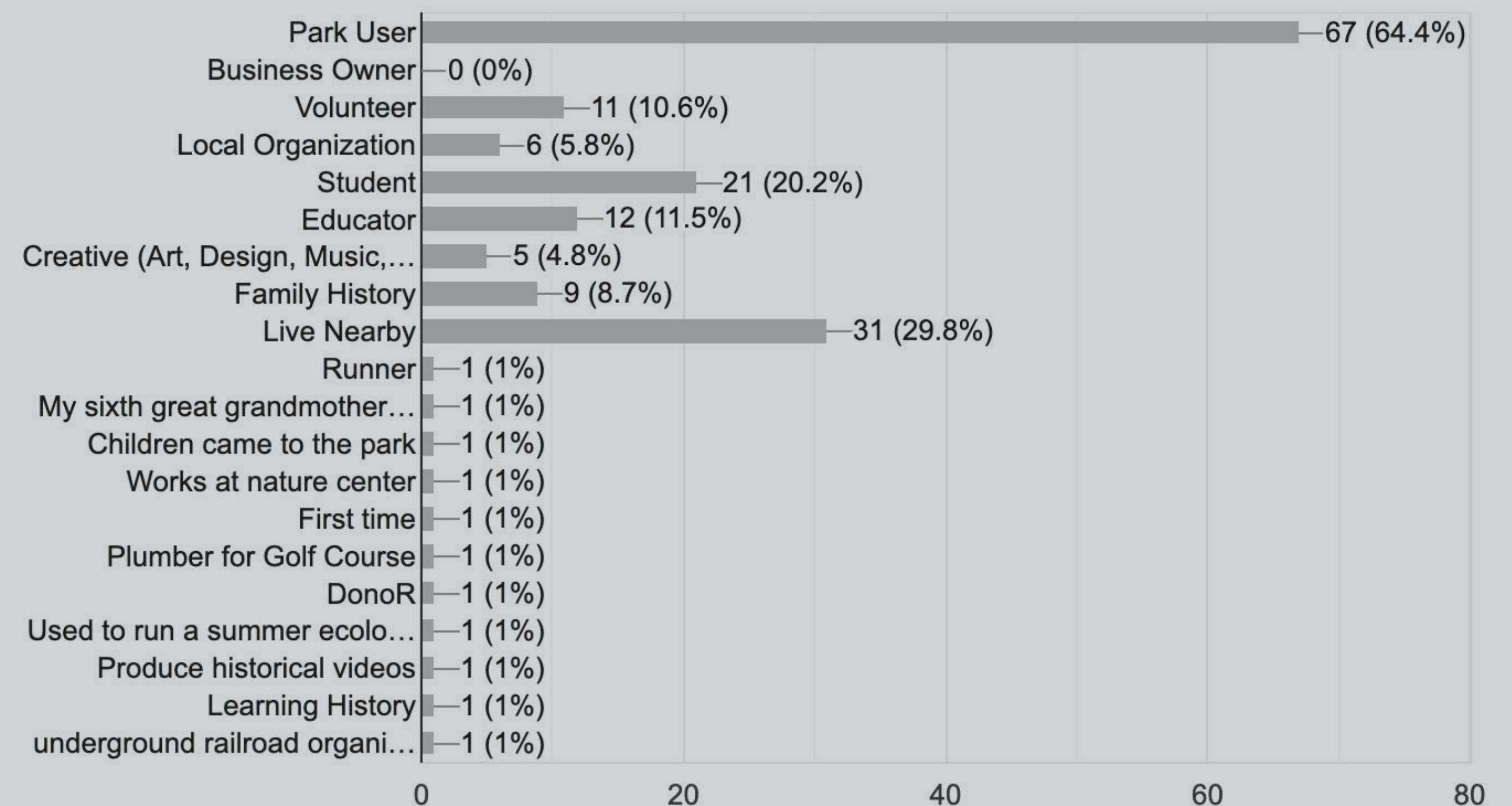


- Riverdale
- Kingsbridge
- Spuyten Duyvil
- Norwood
- Woodlawn
- Van Cortlandt Village
- Washington Heights
- Yonkers
- Harlem
- Bronxville
- Inwood
- Bronxville/Yonkers
- Fresh Meadows
- Washington heights
- MORRISANIA
- yonkers

User Groups

What is your connection to Van Cortlandt Park or the surrounding Bronx community?

104 responses



Initial Takeaways

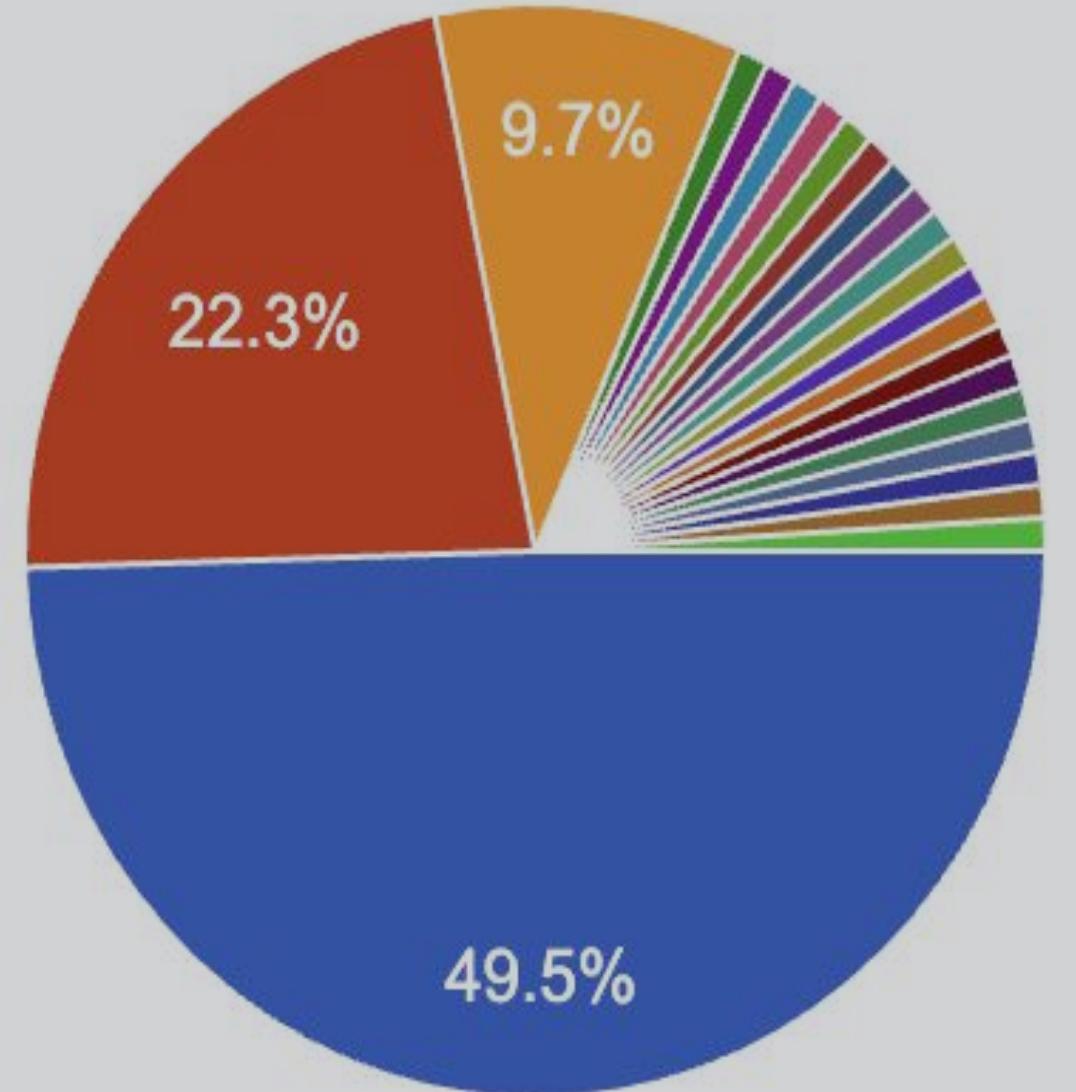
User groups represented so far:

- Majority are park users & live nearby
- Potential to increase outreach to local businesses, organizations and educational institutions

Park Users

How often do you visit the park?

103 responses



- Often - weekly or once a month
- Only for events
- I never go
- Once a year
- Every other day
- Daily
- Not in over 50 years!
- every 3 or 4 months

Initial Takeaways

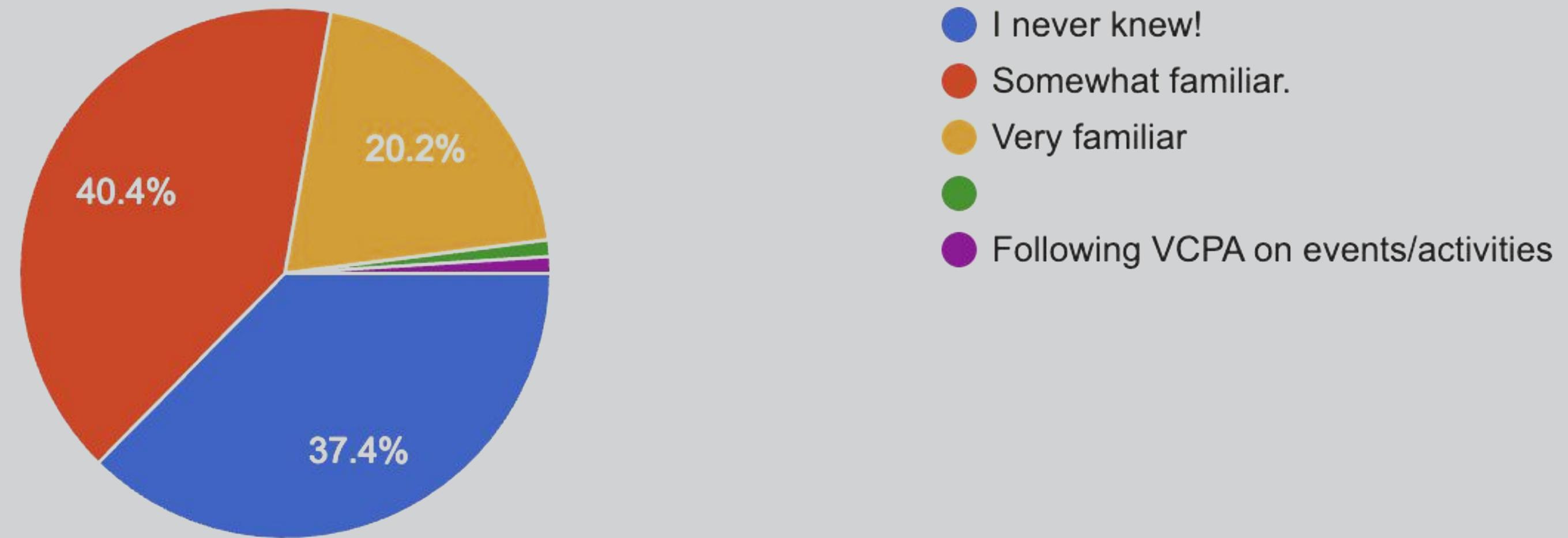
Park users represented so far:

- Majority go frequently
- Specific events prove to draw in more users

Awareness

How familiar are you with the Enslaved African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park?

99 responses

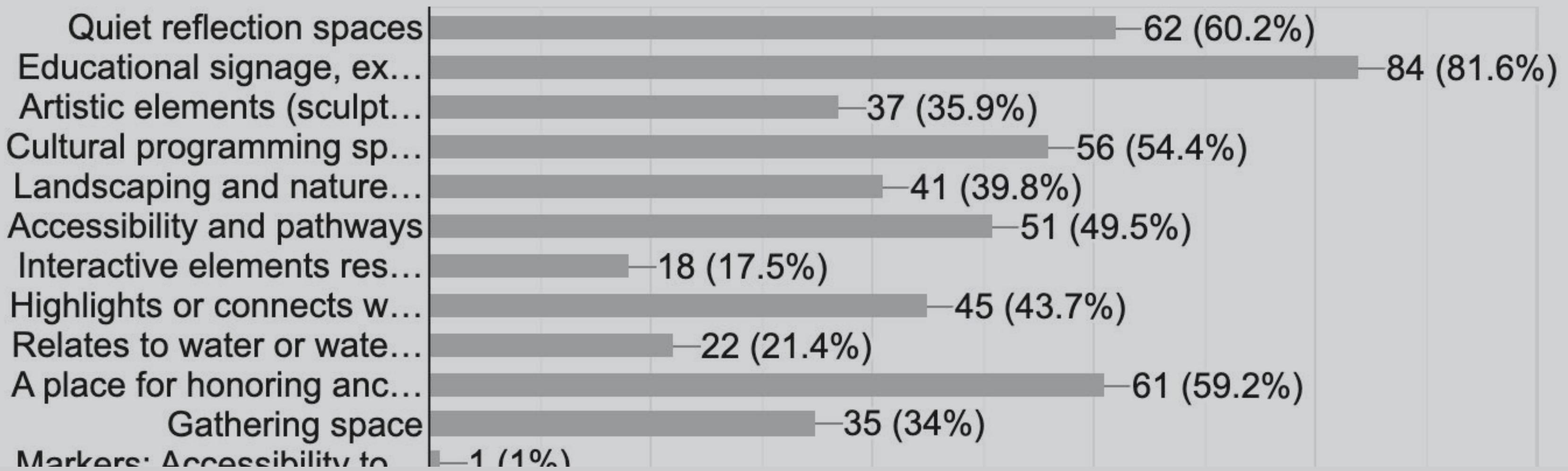


Initial Takeaways

Park users represented so far:

- Almost as many had no idea it was there as were somewhat familiar
- Many shared that signage and events brought their attention to the Burial Ground. Others were shocked that they pass it frequently and never noticed it.
- Potential for flyers promoting design comp near the Burial Ground signage to create awareness.

Design



Initial Takeaways

Design ideas represented so far:

- Top 3 qualities requested: educational signage, quiet reflection space/space to honor ancestors, and cultural programming
- Accessibility and access to nature also ranked high

“Attention to the soil, a garden to bring the space back to life.”

“QR codes, recordings of inspiring African Americans (Viola Davis). Education built into the benches, pavers for everyone to see.”

“Someone told me some of the bodies were taken up after they were buried. It'd be good to know what happened to the people here. To me a burial ground is sacred.”

Quotes

“When we came last year, it went over my daughter’s head. You can’t tell the whole story in one visit. We came back and tied it all together.”

“That it would be a place for people to reflect, meditate, and remember and honor, as well as learn.”

“I hope that we continue to integrate community members in our initiatives.”

“I hope that it can educate and preserve the African and African diasporic ties to our community.”

“I feel connected to the site and I say a prayer there whenever I come around.”

“ My hopes are for the space to stay sacred. For the signage and interaction not to interfere with the somber reality of the space.”

“I hope that the memorial can incorporate a dedicated space that allows for cultural events and groups (e.g., teachers and their classes) to educate themselves on the history of the burial site, as well as space for reflection. My main concern is vandalism and security.”



Design Ideas RFQ

The design ideas competition will launch in November of 2025 and conclude in June of 2026, with the final public exhibition and celebration. The selection process will follow a two-stage process. The first is an open RFQ process, with a simple application requirement. From this pool, the jury will select a smaller number of semi-finalists to undertake interviews with a panel including Legacy Council members and the planning team, who will select the three winners. At this point, each winner will be compensated and be given ~8 weeks to create their design proposals.

Schedule

Nov 18, 2025
Design ideas competition is launched and RFQ opens

Dec 1, 2025
Virtual public information session

Dec 17, 2025
RFQs due by 11:59pm

Jan 28, 2026
Jury meeting; semi-finalists selected

Week of Feb 6, 2026
In person semi-finalist interviews

Feb 12, 2026
Finalists notified

Feb 25, 2026
Design process begins

March 12, 2026
Public forum and announcement

April 22, 2026
Final materials due

June 19, 2026
Final exhibition and celebration

How to Apply

Form to apply at <https://bit.ly/REIMAGININGRFQ>

- Key contact information
- 4 short answer questions:
 - » Why are you interested in this design ideas competition and what relevant experience do you or your team bring to the project?
 - » What is your connection to the Enslaved African Burial Ground or the surrounding Bronx community? Whether from or new to the Bronx, how would you build trust working with this community?
 - » What approaches would you take to designing the Enslaved African Burial Ground? Include how you would make collective decisions within the planning team and community.
 - » Describe a project, preferably from your sample work, where you experienced conflict with stakeholders or collaborators and how you addressed it.

How to Apply

Work Samples: Applicants should create a pdf, not exceeding 10 pages and 25mb in size, with the following content and upload directly to the application form:

- **Background of your firm or description of your individual experience.**
- **At least three previous projects relevant to this RFQ. List specific information: title, date, location, size, materials, type of work, short description, role, etc.**
- **Applicants are welcome to include other creative experience or background that might be relevant to this RFQ, so long as it fits within the 10-page limit.**

Applicants are not expected to create design materials regarding the Burial Ground and will not be judged on these materials if they are included.

Questions?

Submit questions by December 8, 2025 to reimaging@vancortlandt.org



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