CUNY Climate Assembly Project

On Waste at Hunter College

Final Recommendation Report

Summer 2026

In partnership with:

Center for the Humanities

HUNTER The City University of New York

Mellon Foundation

The Institute for Sustainable Cities at Hunter College

The Assembly Project

IRADAC Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean

CUNY Graduate Center



34 Hunter College students, representative of the campus' demographic diversity, made history by convening the first university climate assembly in the US! *(see full list on page 15)*

Thanks and Gratitude

The partnership between the CUNY Graduate Center (the Center for the Humanities and the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean) and Hunter College (The Office of the Provost, Sustainability Council, and The Center for Sustainable Cities) was made possible by the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Special thanks are owed to our Hunter College partners Kelli Stephens, Douglas Price, Gustavo Ordóñez, Nicole Bennett, Peter Marcotullio, and William Solecki, who worked closely with the Center for the Humanities to bring CCAP to life.

Most importantly, thank you to the students who stepped forward to be CCAP Assembly Delegates. Through their commitment, collaboration, and leadership, they are helping shape what democracy and climate action can look like at CUNY, across higher education, and beyond.



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
How the Humanities Strengthen Democracy	4
Program Highlights	5
What Assembly Delegates are Saying	6
Why do a Climate Assembly on Waste Management	7
Governance Structure & Leadership Team	9
CCAP's Democratic Process	11
Civic Lottery	11
Meet the Assembly Delegates and Small Group Facilitators	15
Climate Assembly	18
Values/Criteria for Decision-making	23
Recommendations	25
Conclusion	38

CCAP Executive Summary

In Spring 2026, the CUNY Climate Assembly Project on Waste at Hunter College (CCAP) made history by convening the first university climate assembly in the US!

New York State Executive Order 22 requires all public entities, including CUNY, to develop waste diversion plans that reduce waste disposal by 75 percent from a baseline of Fiscal Year 2018-19. To meet New York State's policy goals, an assembly composed of 34 Hunter College student delegates convened for five full days and four 2-hour workshops to democratically develop waste management solutions at Hunter.

The student delegates were selected by lottery to broadly represent Hunter's perspectives and demographic diversity. During the assembly convenings, delegates learned from a diverse range of experts, weighed the opportunities and challenges of various waste management solutions, and collectively generated nine recommendations for the campus community. From Fall 2026 to Spring 2027, nine post-assembly fellows will work with Hunter College leadership to review and begin implementation planning of the accepted recommendations.

There are over 1000 examples worldwide of civic and climate assemblies. CCAP is uniquely situated within the City University of New York (CUNY), the nation's largest urban public university system. CCAP serves as a model, expanding universities as true schools for democracy, equipping the next generation of civic leaders with skills in facilitation, constructive dialogue, and democratic problem-solving.

This partnership between Hunter College and The Center for Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center was made possible by the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

"Waste management is challenging because it requires an all-hands-on-deck effort. For Hunter College to meet NY State's waste reduction goals, it will require individual behavior change, updating organizational practices and infrastructure, and a collective effort in shifting campus culture.

CCAP provides the democratic process for Hunter students to shape how we as a campus make progress on these goals."

— Gustavo Ordóñez, Hunter College Vice President of Administration

Why a Climate Assembly is well suited for the challenge of waste management

A Climate Assembly gathers everyday people to learn, deliberate, and develop policy solutions to challenging climate issues. What separates a Climate Assembly from other forms of public engagement is who is involved, how they collaboratively problem-solve, and their advantages over traditional policy-making.

Who: The assembly delegates were selected by civic lottery to serve as a microcosm of Hunter College, reflecting the majors, class standing, race, income, and gender of the campus at large. This brought new voices to the table, surfacing insights and perspectives that ground the proposals in the campus community's needs.

How: During the assembly convenings, delegates spent 37 hours learning with sanitation and custodial professionals, administrative leaders in sustainability, urban planners, and waste systems experts. The democratic design created the space for facilitated deliberations, creative problem-solving, and for all voices to be heard.

Advantages: The student-led, administration-backed democratic process united the institution around an issue requiring cross-departmental action. The resulting public awareness and collective problem-solving generated informed solutions that can bridge persistent policy implementation gaps while building trust between the administration and student body.

The Recommendations

After nine days of deep learning, deliberation, and drafting, the assembly delegates voted on the recommendations. 7 of the 9 received above the 75% supermajority agreement threshold. Below is the summary of the recommendations; please see pages 17 -25 to review them in their totality.

Recommendations with supermajority agreement from the assembly (above 75%)

1. **Expand Centralized Waste Stations (100.00%)** — Establish centralized waste stations at points of high activity and eliminate all unlabelled standalone waste bins campus-wide.
2. **Redesign Central Waste Stations (100.00%)** — Redesign centralized waste station bins to have proper and consistent bin size and design, imagery/visuals, color coding, and lids that match the waste that goes in each bin.
3. **Composting Program (92.31%)** — Introduce compost bins on campus and allocate proper custodial staffing, funding, and adequate Resources for establishing and maintaining a composting and collection program.
4. **In-House Composting Infrastructure (80.77%)** — Invest in resources for in-house infrastructure for composting (acquire an in-vessel composter to compost food waste on site).
5. **Single-Use Plastic Reduction (92.31%)** — Eliminate single-use plastic and styrofoam waste from food service providers on campus.
6. **Sustainability Working Group (92.31%)** — Launch a paid sustainability working group led by approximately 5-7 students. The working group would focus on research (for example, students trained by DSNY or Post Landfill Action Network to conduct waste audits), data collection, and event coordination that supports sustainability culture and works towards a zero-waste campus.

7. **Education: Trash Talk Orientation (96.15%)** — The Hunter Green Team will use The Green Initiative Fund to implement an engaging educational segment on sustainability and waste management during orientation. The Green Team will inform students of Hunter's waste capacities, functions, goals, and etiquette. Additionally, a short (3-4 minute) Brightspace module will be designed for orientation students, preferably in the form of a game similar to the one on the DSNY sorting website

Recommendations below supermajority agreement (Below 75%)

1. **Green Week (73.08%)** — Utilizing the Green Initiative Fund, a group of students a part of the Green Team will be paid and given the resources to organize a Green Week (3-5 days). This would involve organizing sustainability events such as a clothing swap, repair fair, planting/gardening, lending library, etc.
2. **Paper Towel Reduction (61.54%)** — Decrease the use of paper towels in restrooms by introducing more hand dryers

Next Steps

From Fall 2026 -Spring 2027, 9 post-assembly fellows will work with campus leadership to review, respond, and begin the planning and implementation of the accepted recommendations.





How the Humanities Strengthen Democracy

CCAP's working hypothesis was that engaging a diverse & demographically representative cohort of CUNY students through democratic decision-making– grounded in lived experience, expert testimony, active learning, and, uniquely, humanistic inquiry– **would deepen both process and outcomes from ethical, cultural, and historical perspectives.**

By bringing multiple perspectives into synthesis through the Assembly process itself, students would begin to critically **reimagine their relationship to democracy, sustainability, and public higher education** through the "wedge issue" of waste. Building on the 3Cs of youth development (competence, connection, confidence), the Assembly would provide a civic platform that prepares students to participate more fully in constructive dialogue, campus governance, and civil society.

This hypothesis is grounded by over 1000 examples of civic and climate assemblies worldwide, but is distinct as CCAP is the first university-convened climate assembly in the US– situated at the nation's largest urban public university.

Program Highlights

Student-led & administration-backed.

Hunter College President Nancy Cantor and top-level administrators have committed to the democratic process and will provide a public response of which recommendations can be accepted, which cannot, and which are of interest and may need adaptation.

Nearly 600 students entered the Civic Lottery

The 34 selected Delegates were a representative sample of Hunter College coming from all 5 boroughs and 17 academic departments.

The inclusion of disciplinary representation alongside core demographic criteria in the civic lottery was unique to CCAP, helping promote diverse ways of thinking, knowing, and collaborating.

Over 250 students outside the assembly engaged

CCAP's Campus Waste Survey, public events, and the classroom curriculum.

15 experts on tap

Sanitation and custodial professionals, leaders in sustainability, and urban planners offered expertise on systems-level waste management, diversion, and reduction. The combination of lived experience and expertise laid the foundation for civic problem-solving throughout the process.

Delegates in the assembly spent 37 hours learning, deliberating, and civic problem-solving.

7 of the 9 drafted recommendations passed with supermajority support by the assembly (above 75%)

CCAP in the press

New York Focus published an article documenting the CCAP process as the first university-convened climate assembly in the US and its implications for the broader movement for democracy renewal in NYC and beyond.

A model for democracy in higher education.

CCAP serves as a model in expanding universities into true schools for democracy and equipping the next generation of civic leaders with skills in facilitation, constructive dialogue, and democratic problem-solving.

What Assembly Delegates are Saying about CCAP

"I really enjoyed hearing from people from a range of different backgrounds and how their experiences with trash have changed from the information they were gathering."

***

"The community and how practical everything about it was. It was so well organized and thought out which made it feel so enjoyable and exciting".

***



"I loved how long the process was, I think conversations and solutions around waste cannot be quick as the process of responsibly discarding our trash also takes time and consideration. Being comfortable with slower processes and releasing the immediacy which modern consumption habits have ingrained in our culture is necessary!!"

***

"Interacting with the custodial staff itself, especially early on, centered the issue around their contribution."

***

"Many of the presentations were very fascinating and I learned a lot from every one I was there for."

***

"It was great to get into details and speak more freely with each other due to our familiarity and all of the time spent together during the semester. I was pleasantly surprised at the understanding we had for each other in disagreements and how often we all aligned in our vision for zero waste Hunter."

***

"I honestly really liked all of it. The facilitators.... The activities & the way it was all orchestrated was well planned & managed. It was exciting & fun and we still were doing important work."



***

"It was enjoyable and it did feel more like a group of peers than strangers toward the end."

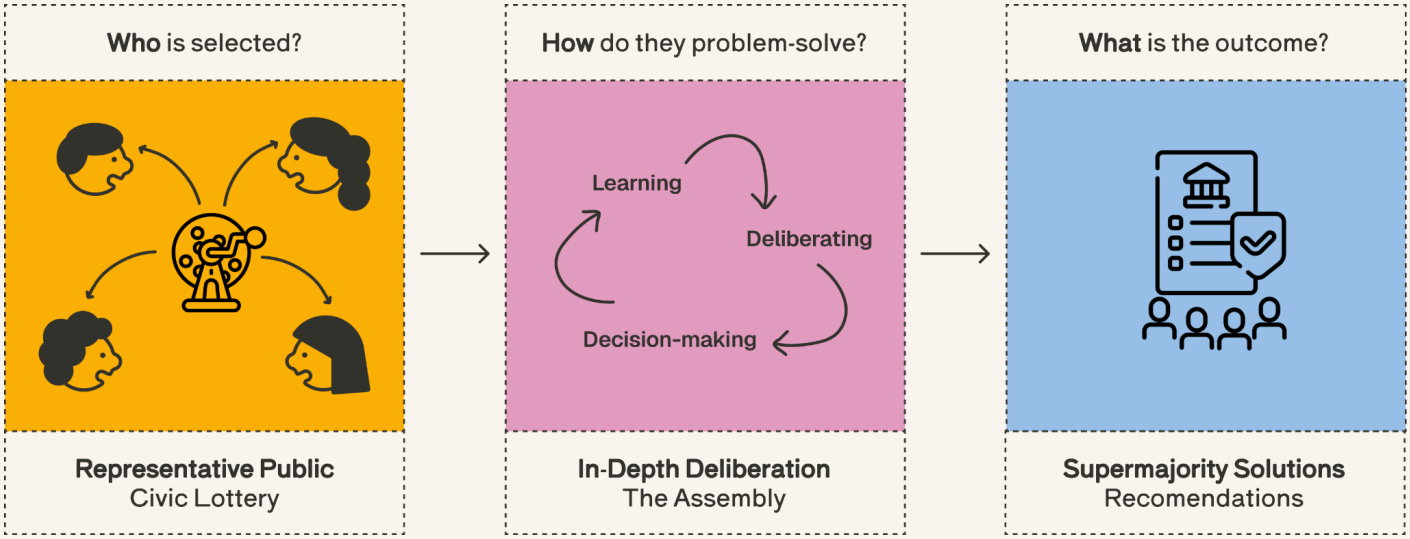
***

"It was productive. We clearly generated ideas with applicability and a path toward implementation."

Why do a Climate Assembly on Waste Management

Climate Assemblies gather everyday people to learn, deliberate, and develop policy solutions to a challenging climate issue. Also called citizens' assemblies, civic assemblies, or policy juries, these forums democratize policymaking with over 1000 examples around the world.

What separates a Climate Assembly from other forms of public engagement is who is selected, how they collaboratively problem-solve, and the outcomes and advantages over traditional policy-making.



Who is Selected- *Representative Public via a Civic Lottery*
A civic lottery is a fair and transparent method to bring a representative sample of a community into civic problem-solving and decision-making. Similar to jury duty, delegates are randomly selected and stratified to reflect the community's demographic diversity. The CCAP Assembly Delegates served as a microcosm of Hunter College, reflecting the majors, class standing, race, income, and gender of the campus at large. This brought new voices to the table, surfacing insights and perspectives that ground the proposals in the campus community's needs.

How do they problem-solve- *The Climate Assembly*
During the assembly convenings, delegates spent 37 hours, ~1250 hours cumulatively, learning with sanitation and custodial professionals, administrative leaders in sustainability, urban planners, and waste systems experts. The democratic design created the space for facilitated deliberations, creative problem-solving, and for all voices to be heard.

What are the Outcomes- *Super Majority Solutions*
The result is a list of evidence-based recommendations drafted by the assembly. Moreover, the delegates. process united the institution around an issue requiring cross-departmental action. The resulting public awareness and collective problem-solving generated informed solutions that can bridge persistent policy implementation gaps while building trust between the administration and student body.

Key Advantages:

1. **Brings in new voices & strengthens civic muscles.** Climate Assemblies engage people who might not otherwise participate in public decision-making. Delegates build new relationships, work across differences, and develop the confidence and skills for future civic engagement.

2. **Leads to better policy.** Research shows that diverse groups tend to outperform homogeneous ones, even groups of experts, in solving complex, values-driven problems. Deliberations grounded in expert analysis and lived experience create informed decisions based on evidence rather than opinions.

3. **Provides legitimacy to make hard decisions with tough trade-offs.** Climate policies typically require substantial adaptation, compromise, and even sacrifice. Climate Assemblies can provide administrations the public support necessary to put forward ambitious policies.

4. **Builds public awareness and momentum for cross-departmental action.** The attention and focus an assembly generates on an issue can help galvanize an ecosystem of administrative and public actors, which is crucial for making progress on complex issues.

5. **Increases trust in civic institutions.** By engaging the public in collaborative governance, it strengthens transparency, accountability, and relationships between institutions and the people they serve.

6. **Revitalizes political agency.** Climate Assemblies create pathways for a general public to effect change on system-level issues. Delegates often leave with a stronger sense that democratic participation can make a tangible difference.

Governance Structure & Leadership Team

The people supporting the climate assembly are organized into six committees, each playing a distinct role in the assembly's operation, impact, and external oversight. The governance structure enables deep collaboration, independent responsibilities, and a diversity of stakeholders to ensure the program's democratic integrity.

Assembly Impact

Institutional Committee

Administrative stakeholders who support the assembly process, and receive and respond to the recommendations

Impact Network Committee

Cross-campus group of university centers, faculty, and student organizers who support the assembly process, and receive and respond to the recommendations.

Inside the Assembly

Assembly Delegates

34 Hunter Students

Small Group Facilitators

8 CUNY GC Students

Assembly Operation

Assembly Design Committee

The team that designs and facilitates the flow of the assembly and broader public engagement activities outside of the assembly.

Learning Content Committee

An independent body that curates the information and presenters provided to the assembly

External Oversight

Evaluation Committee

Researchers that conduct monitor & evaluation process for the assembly

External Advisory Committee

Practioneers from the Deliberative Democracy field provide strategic advice on assembly design

CCAP Governance Committee Members

Institutional Committee

Gustavo Ordóñez, VP for Administration

Nicole Bennett, Associate Provost & Assistant Vice President, Academic Affairs

Kelli Stephens, Sustainability and Energy Specialist & CCAP Administrative Lead

Christopher Braun, Associate Provost & Assistant Vice President, Research

Lara Miranda, Administrative Executive Officer for the Hunter College Senate

Zobeida Gomez, Director of Operations, Facilities Management and Planning

Jennifer Tuten, Special Adviser to Hunter Provost

Assembly Design Committee

Kendra Sullivan, CCAP Co-Director & Director of the Center for the Humanities

Herman Bennett, CCAP Co-Director, Professor & Director of the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean (IRADAC)

Forrest Sparks, CCAP Program Lead, Co-Founder and Director of The Assembly Project (TAP)

Annie Stoeth, Curriculum Development Fellow, Earth and Environmental Sciences PhD Candidate

Cameron Espinoza, Communications Fellow, Political Science PhD Candidate

Sasha Isaac, Democratic Engagement Fellow, Geography PhD Candidate

Evaluation Committee

Anna Marchese, Senior Project Officer at Columbia World Projects

Caroline Hanley, Professor of Sociology at William & Mary.

Impact Network Committee

Douglas Price, Program Manager of The Center for Sustainable Cities

Alice Yee, Hunter Sustainability Council

Nate Levin, Hunter Sustainability Council

Teneia Wooten, Assistant Director of Student Activities and Leadership Development

Sumaiya Ahmed, Undergraduate Student Government President

Learning Content Committee

Peter Marcotullio, Professor in the Department of Geography

William Solecki, Professor in the Department of Geography

Ramiro Campos, Professor in the Department of Geography

Robin Nagle, Clinical Professor at NYU, Author of Picking Up

Fran Agnone, Director of Education, Sanitation Foundation

External Advisors

Linn Davis, Program Director, Healthy Democracy

Benjamin Solotaire, Senior Advisor, NYC Civic Engagement Commission

Phil Lindsay, Director of the Democracy Innovation Hub at Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College

CCAP's Democratic Process

In February 2025, the Center for the Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center launched the CUNY Climate Assembly Project (CCAP) with a $150,000 pilot grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The first year was spent crafting the project's operational plan, building the internal team, and developing the partnership with Hunter College.

Waste management was chosen as a focus area for the Climate Assembly due to NY State's policy goals for waste diversion. Waste reduction at Hunter College requires individual behavior change, updating organizational practices and infrastructure, and shifting campus culture, making this challenge well suited to the democratic process.

CCAP Challenge Statement

NY State Executive Order 22 requires all public entities, including CUNY, to develop waste diversion plans. From a student perspective, what incentives, structures, and systems would facilitate more effective waste management at vertical urban campuses, like Hunter College?

Civic Lottery: December 2025 – February 2026

Students who opted into the lottery were randomly selected to create an assembly that was broadly representative of Hunter's unique demographic diversity. To remove barriers to participation, delegates were provided a **$750 stipend to participate**, and support for child care and language translation were available if needed.

All 23,000+ students at Hunter College received an invitation to opt in to the Civic Lottery. Nearly **600 students entered**. 42 students were initially selected, and after participation confirmations and alternate selections, the Assembly was finalized with 34 delegates.

Civic Lottery





CCAP's mascot RACUNY ↑



"CCAP helps bring an interdisciplinary group of students from all walks of life to work together and come up with solutions to a problem that touches us all. We are excited to learn from the strategies the assembly delegates recommend, and how they can help Hunter College, other CUNY campuses, our neighborhood, and the great city of New York in reducing waste."

— Nicole Bennett, Associate Provost & Assistant Vice President, Academic Affairs

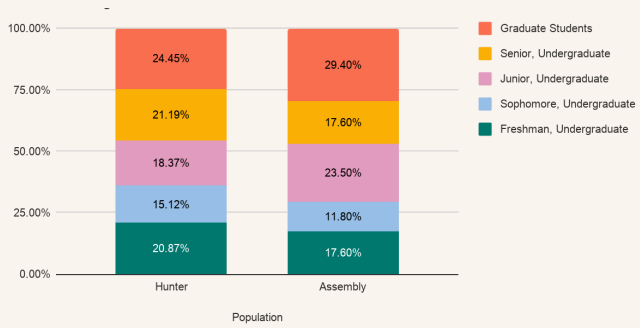




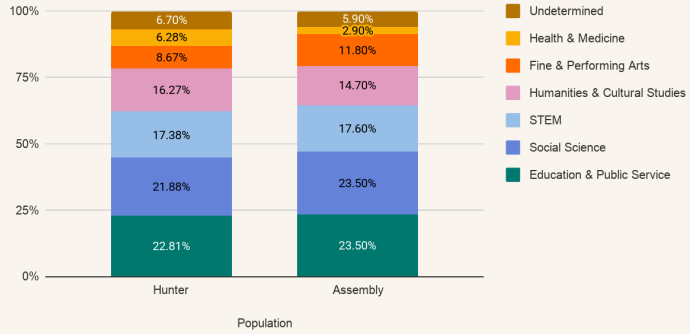
The Assembly's Demographics

The bar charts below compare Hunter College's demographics to the delegates in the assembly.

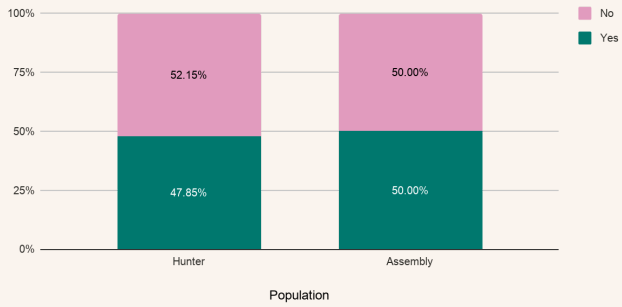
Class Standing



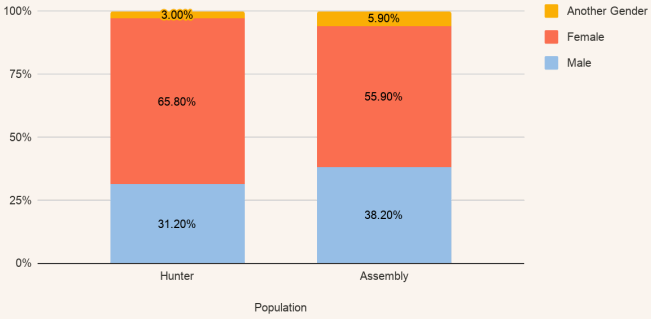
Major Category



Pell Grant Recipients

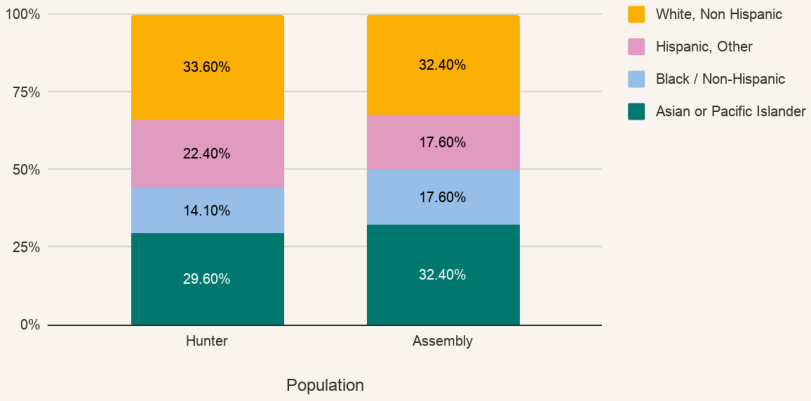


Gender



Note: The "no" percentage for Pell Grant recipients also includes graduate students who are not eligible for Pell Grants. 63% of undergraduates received the Pell Grant in the 2023-2024 academic year.

Race / Ethnicity



Delegates Across the City

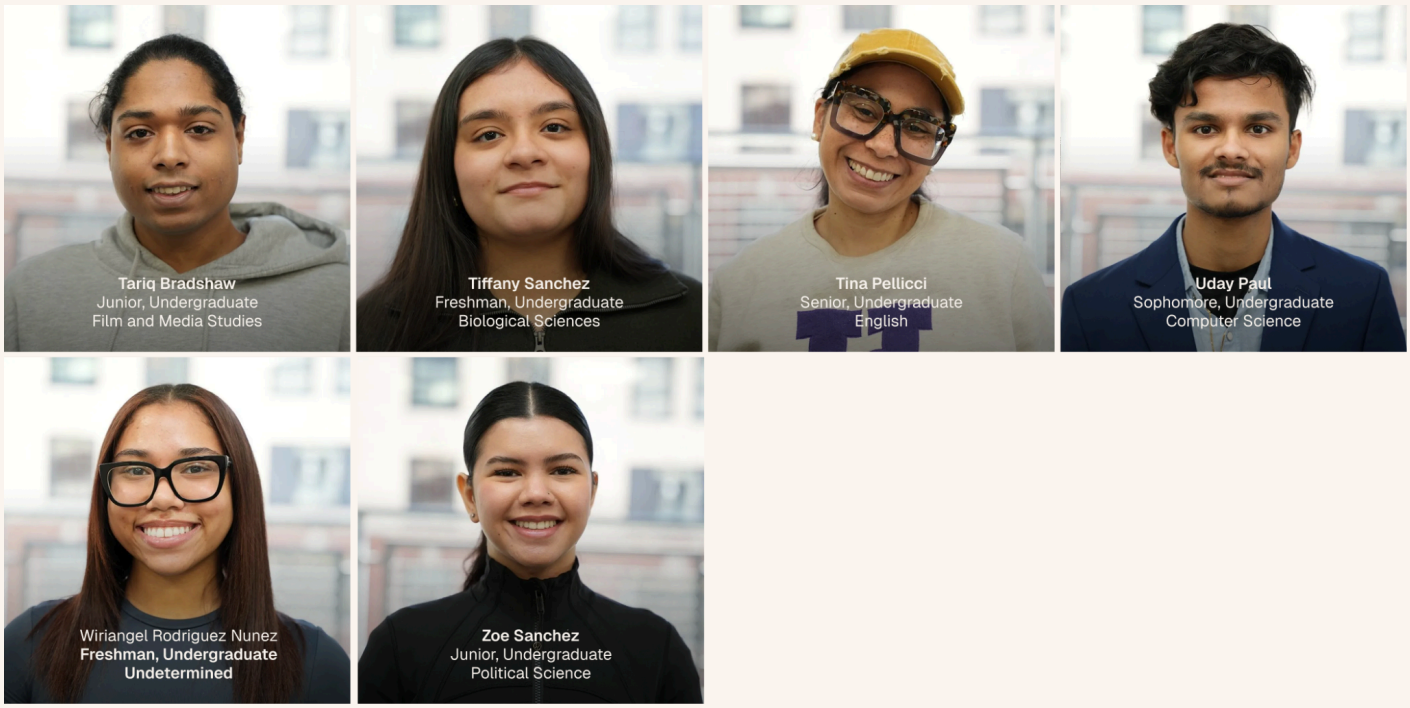


Meet the Assembly Delegates & Small Group Facilitators

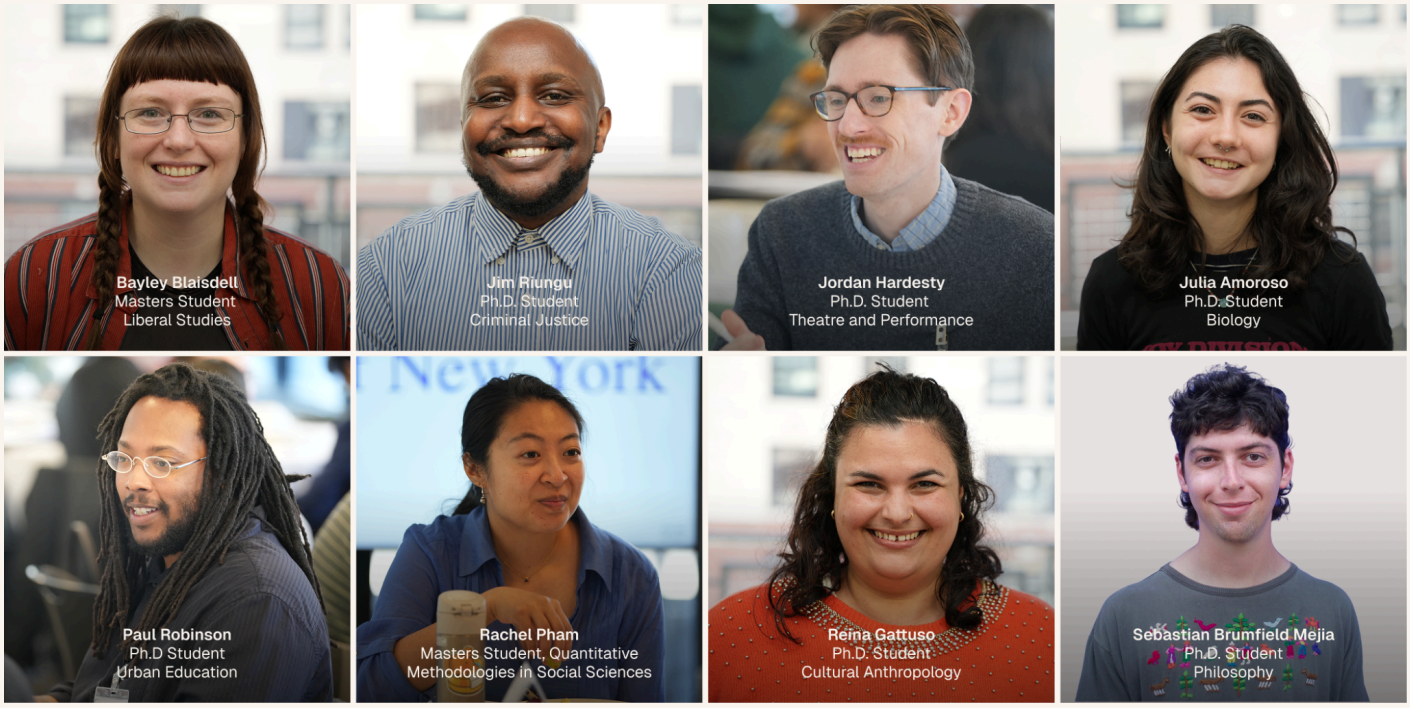
The 34 Assembly Delegates served as a representative sample of Hunter College, reflecting the majors, class standing, race, income, and gender of the campus at larg**e. Students came from across the 5 boroughs and 17 academic departments**. Emerging and established artists, writers, historians, economists, environmental lawyers, psychologists, scientists, storytellers, and filmmakers filled the room. This diversity is the assembly's inherent strength, a collective intelligence that equips the delegates to solve the complex challenge of waste.




Hailey Rose Kuhns
Junior, Undergraduate
Film and Media Studies
Hannah Katz
Junior, Undergraduate
Political Science
Harrison Bruhn
Freshman, Undergraduate
Anthropology
Justin Natera
Senior, Undergraduate
Film and Media Studies
Kimberly Cuapio
Master Student
Social Work
Luisa Pellettieri
Senior, Undergraduate
Sociology
Maria Sophia Valencia
Sophomore, Undergraduate
Psychology
Messiah Etienne
Freshman, Undergraduate
Undetermined
Michael Esteras
Master Student
English
Myros Orestis Shiamilis
Master Student
School of Education
Nelly Caceres
Master Student
Social Work
Nicholas Mawhinney
Senior, Undergraduate
Film and Media Studies
Nicole Leggio
Master Student
Social Work
Rozen Kapadia
Junior, Undergraduate
Psychology
Sifaks Hammadi
Junior, Undergraduate
Computer Science
Taige Rambarran
Master Student
Urban Policy and Planning



Eight Small Group Facilitators from the CUNY Graduate Center served to support the assembly delegates' dialogue and civic problem-solving. They are the stewards of the democratic process, ensuring that all delegates could contribute to the deliberations and shape the recommendations.



The Assembly: April – June 2026

The Assembly Delegates convened for five full days and four 2-hour workshops for a total of **37 hours (~ 1250 cumulative delegate hours).** This video helps to capture the energy and process. For more details on each day's programming, see the summary on the next few pages, the CCAP Recap Part 1 and Part 2, and the assembly agendas.

High-level Assembly Process Takeaways

- **15 Experts on tap** — Sanitation and custodial professionals, leaders in sustainability, and urban planners offered expertise on systems-level waste management, diversion, and reduction. The combination of lived experience and technical knowledge laid the foundation for informed civic discourse throughout the process.
- **Assembly Program Co-developed with the Delegates**- While phase 1 was curated by the CCAP Learning Content Committee, the programming in phases 2 and 3, was all driven by the delegates' input. This included speakers covering institutional and university zero-waste case studies/design, the campus waste station mapping activity, and reviewing the administration's answers to delegates' information requests. This both empowers the assembly and helps to safeguard from becoming overly directed by institutional priorities.
- **Survey and Public Forum** — Nearly 200 Hunter students, faculty, and staff completed a campus waste and recycling survey. The broader campus community was invited to the Public Form to analyze survey data, to understand the challenges and opportunities.
- **Collaborative Governance continues after the Assembly** — From Fall 2026 -Spring 2027, 9 post-assembly fellows will work with campus leadership to review, respond, and begin the planning and implementation of the accepted recommendations. This helps to continue the momentum and trust generated from the assembly while further embedding student insight into ongoing decision-making.
- **To broaden the impact of CCAP**, curricula on democracy and waste management were created for faculty to use in their courses. Lesson plans were designed to be easily implemented (plug and play), adaptable, and broadly relevant to Hunter students, across disciplines. These lessons will continue to be activated for classrooms during Fall 2026 and Spring 2027.

CCAP Road Map

Civic Lottery

December 2025 - February 2026

- All 23,000+ students were invited via email to enter the lottery.
- 34 assembly delegates were selected in a public lottery event from a pool of nearly 600 entries

Phase 1

April 6th and 7th (10 – 5 pm)

- Build relationships with fellow delegates & develop community agreements
- Understand Waste Management at Hunter College.
  - Challenges and opportunities
- Develop a list of information/speaker requests to inform the assembly programming moving forward.

Phase 2

April 24th, May 1st, May 8th, May 15th (12 – 2 pm)

- Learn from speaker /information requests from Phase 1
- Create values for decision-making to guide the recommendation drafting
- Conduct a mapping of the campus waste station infrustructure

May 15th Public Forum

- Collaborate with the broader campus community
- Analyze the Campus Waste Survey

Post-Assembly Fellowship

August 2026 - June 2027

- Nine fellows present to the Hunter College Admin
- Admin provides a public response to recommendations
- Fellows and admin sponsors develop planning and implementation strategies for the accepted recommendations.

Phase 3

June 1st, 2nd, and 3rd (10 – 3 pm)

- Synthesize learnings from phases 1 and 2
- Draft and refine recommendations through multiple rounds
- Receive feedback from admin and waste system expert advisors
- Revise recommendations & vote

Summary of the CCAP Learning Process

Phase 1: April 6th & 7th

Introduction to CCAP, Relationship Building, and Community Agreements
Hunter Leadership opened by expressing their excitement and commitment to the democratic process. Delegates then got to know each other through facilitated conversations and developed community agreements to support respectful deliberations.

- Kendra Sullivan- CCAP Co-Director & Director of the Center for the Humanities
- Kelli Stephens- Sustainability and Energy, CCAP Administrative Lead
- Gustavo Ordóñez– Vice President for Administration
- Nicole Bennett- Associate Provost & Assistant Vice President, Academic Affairs
- Forrest Sparks - CCAP Program Lead

History of Waste in NYC
Delegates learned about the social and environmental consequences of unmanaged waste before the establishment of the Department of Street Cleaning and how New York City's approach to waste management has evolved since.

- Robin Nagle- Clinical Professor of anthropology & environmental studies at NYU, Author of Picking Up

Waste Life Cycle
Delegates learned about the various waste streams (recycling, composting, landfill), linear and circular waste economies, and conducted a root cause analysis with typically discarded waste materials.

- Fran Agnone- Director of Youth Education at the Sanitation Foundation
- Ramiro Campos- Professor of Geography at Hunter College

Personal Relationship to Waste & Creating a Waste Artifact
Delegates had time to journal on their personal relationship with waste and create murals that collectively imagined new relationships to waste.

Waste Management at Hunter and CUNY
Delegates were introduced to past initiatives, current challenges, and opportunities concerning composting, waste sorting, and procurement. The CCAP Intro packet: State of Waste Management at Hunter provided context on Hunter's past initiatives

- Kelli Stephens- Sustainability and Energy & CCAP Administrative Lead
- Douglas Price- Program Manager of The Center for Sustainable Cities
- Tria Case- University Executive Director of Sustainability and Energy Conservation

Walking Tour of Hunter Waste Facilities
Delegates learned firsthand from custodial staff about the flows of waste on campus: from the waste bins to the campus compacting machine, and how waste is picked up by DSNY.

- Zobeida Gomez- Director of Operations, Facilities Management and Planning
- Steven Jordan- Senior Supervisor of the Custodial Supervisors and Custodial Staff
- Jorge Valles- Custodial Supervisor

Challenge Mapping & Speaker and Information Requests
Delegates synthesized their learnings and voted on the most important information speaker requests. Requests informed the rest of the assembly's programming

Phase 2: April 24th, May 1st, 8th, & 15th

NYC Waste Policy
Delegates learned about how the city currently handles waste and the policies that mandate how Hunter manages its waste

- Kate Kitchener- Executive Director, Resource Recovery at DSNY

Drafting Values for Decision-making
Delegates learned about principles for designing waste management infrastructure to support behavior change and institutional efficiency. This Best Practices Manual was provided to support the delegates.

- Clare Miflin- Founder & Executive Director, Center for Zero Waste Design

Waste Life Cycle
The values/criteria for decision-making below were prioritized by the Assembly Delegates to guide how they drafted and collectively evaluated the projects. Drafts were finalized in Phase 3.

Campus Waste Station Mapping Activity
Delegates walked the different floors of the campus and collectively mapped their observation around waste stations in highly trafficked areas.

Public Forum
The broader campus community was invited to join the Assembly Delegates to analyze the Campus Waste Survey results and ideate on waste management solutions.

Phase 3: June 1st, 2nd, & 3rd

University Zero-waste Case Studies

Delegates learned about various campuses across the US that have implemented cost-effective waste reduction programs.

- Lisa Smart- Post Landfill Action Network Zero-waste Consulting Manager

Synthesizing Learnings

All of the ideas, challenges, notes from the activities (public forum, the administration's answers to information requests from phase 1, and campus waste station maps) were posted on the walls for the delegates to identify patterns and strategic opportunities for their recommendations.

Office Hours with Advisors

Delegates received feedback on their recommendations from administrators and waste systems experts who presented earlier in the process.

Recommendation Drafting, Revising, and Voting

There were multiple rounds of drafting and revision throughout the three days. One preliminary vote occurred June 2nd to provide a temperature check so any final concerns or ideas could be addressed during the final day.

Values / Criteria for Decision-making

The values/criteria for decision-making below were developed by the Assembly Delegates to guide how they drafted and collectively evaluated the recommendations. These values should be a tool to guide the planning and implementation of the recommendations moving forward

CCAP Values / Criteria for Decision-Making

Education

Recommendations should expand awareness, understanding, and adoption of waste mitigation strategies.

- Visibility and awareness
- Transparency and communication
- Grounded in empathy and patience- people should not feel intimidated or policed

Sustainability

Recommendations should be designed for long-term waste reduction and environmental impact.

- Calculated metrics that can measure impact
- Building off existing resources while not overtaxing them
- Addressing needs in a manner that is effective and sustainable

Equity

Recommendations should be accessible, inclusive, and considerate of the diverse campus populations who interact with the campus's waste systems, both on the front end and through the labor required to maintain them.

- Accessibility and comfort
- Equity across campus groups and populations
- Empathy and consideration for custodial labor and capacity

Culture of Collective Stewardship

Recommendations should foster a culture of shared responsibility, accountability, and collaboration where students, staff, faculty, administration, and custodial workers all have pathways towards decreasing campus waste.

- Diplomatic collaboration across groups
- Shared accountability and participation
- Incentivizing people to care and engage

Institutional Transparency / Accountability

Recommendations should strive to include mechanisms that facilitate institutional accountability and transparency during the planning & implementation

Maintenance & Labor
Recommendations should account for the people, labor/capacity, infrastructure, and costs that underpin their longevity.

Scoring of the recommendations on the following pages was done as follows:

- **Primary Score: Super Majority Agreement** (Above 75%)
  - Strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral or don't know, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree
- **Value Alignment Score**
  - High, Medium, Low

Recommendations

#1 — Centralized Waste Stations: 100% Support

Establish centralized waste stations at points of high activity and eliminate all unlabelled standalone waste bins campus-wide.

Place centralized waste stations at strategic and consistent locations that are accessible to all rooms/campus users

- For example, one centralized waste station can cover a wing of classrooms
- Incorporate centralized waste stations right outside of lobby as these trash cans are not separated and have been seen overflowing and ignored
- Have one station visible from any angle at high foot-trafficked areas
- Incorporate waste stations nearby food truck vendors outside Hunter College

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?

- Reduces cross-contamination in waste/recycling bins
  - Can implement a trash audit (volunteer, student, or fellowship-driven) to test this theory
- Reduces labor, in theory, for custodial staff due to less total bins on campus
- Facilitates intentional sorting of waste by students who frequently use centralized waste stations.

Any specifications or must-haves related to this idea?

- Must achieve coverage of all classrooms with centralized waste stations before removing the per-classroom bins
  - Failing to do so may result in people not disposing of their waste properly.
- Acquire door stoppers to replace the repurposing of waste bins as door stoppers.

Primary Score		
Votes		**Percent**
Strongly Agree	26	100%
Somewhat Agree	0	0.00%
Neutral / Don't Know	0	0.00%
Somewhat Disagree	0	0.00%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	High
Sustainability	High
Equity	High
Culture of Collective Stewardship	High
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	High
Maintenance & Labor	High

#2 — Redesign Central Waste Stations: 100% Support

Redesign centralized waste station bins to have proper and consistent bin size and design, imagery/visuals, color coding, and lids that match the waste that goes in each bin. We recommend the following color-coding for the centralized waste stations:

- **Waste - Black**
- **Paper Recycling - Green**
- **Plastic, Glass, Metals Mixed Recycling - Blue**
- **Compost - Brown**

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?

- Students spend less time reading/deconstructing signage to see what goes in each bin and, instead, can match images to physical items
- Matching openings for bins also helps make it easier for students to think about their trash and throw the correct item into the right bin
- Less chance of error/cross-contamination, taken more seriously by students, staff, faculty, etc., and does not defeat its purpose
- Transparency around Hunter's waste initiatives through marketing and communications campaigns that promote a culture of sustainability among all communities at Hunter. There is a need for behavior/attitude changes around mindful waste and sustainability, and culture plays a huge part in that.

Any specifications or must-haves related to this idea?

- Color coding specific bins to what people already expect the bins to be colored (trash=black, plastic recycling=blue, paper recycling=green, and composting=brown)
- A similar bin design to College of Charleston's and University of Georgia's in Lisa Smart's presentation, slide 16:
- Apply engaging and colorful graphic design (graphics, shapes, etc.) that effectively communicate the proper waste for each bin (on all sides of the bins too)

Primary Score		
Votes		**Percent**
Strongly Agree	24	92.31%
Somewhat Agree	2	7.69%
Neutral / Don't Know	0	0.00%
Somewhat Disagree	0	0.00%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	High
Sustainability	High
Equity	High
Culture of Collective Stewardship	High
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	High
Maintenance & Labor	High

- Explore liquid diversion; Subject to custodial staff approval
- Adjust shapes (if needed) for the lids/opening of these bins
- Shadow boxes (shapes filled with no details)/ large signage placed in the most high-traffic places (ex. Library floors, 3rd floor intersections, highly populated hallways)
- Flat posters in low-traffic areas (other hallways for example)
- Shadow boxes and posters should show everyday products/products that are often used and also often seen at Hunter (like Monster energy cans and chip bags)
- Marketing/posters showing how Hunter cares about waste → communicate Hunter's waste initiatives and waste diversion, bring transparency
- Reinforce waste management and frame it into something for people to try, as a nudge for people

#3 — Composting Program: 92.31% Support

Implement a composting and collection program at Hunter College

- Introduce compost bins on campus and allocate proper custodial staffing, funding and adequate resources for establishing and maintaining a composting and collection program.
- Our goal is to have a sustainable, long-term composting program that works and meets Hunter's waste diversion goals.

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?

- Increase organics waste diversion in order to meet waste diversion goals (institutional and state). Hunter Goals:
  - Implement a comprehensive food waste collection solution in Hunter West Cafeteria.
  - Increase the waste diversion rate by 30% by December 2028.
- Roughly one-third to over half of what we throw away is organic matter (food scraps and paper). [1]
- 62% of survey respondents report that food scraps/leftovers is a type of waste they most often need to dispose of.
- Upkeep of these programs require a consistent base of volunteers/ workers who can maintain this program. Having roles open to keep this up helps prepare students for careers in zero waste and sustainability.

Any specifications or must-haves related to this idea?

- The President's Office must provide funding for 2-5 paid student Sustainability Fellows
- Inquire from DSNY if we can have curbside compost pickup more than once a week
- Recommendation to start small with a pilot program, focusing on organics diversion – for example, in cafeteria and dining areas – and eventually scale up to composting and potentially biofuels once ready

Primary Score		
Votes		**Percent**
Strongly Agree	20	76.92%
Somewhat Agree	4	15.38%
Neutral / Don't Know	2	7.69%
Somewhat Disagree	0	0.00%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	High
Sustainability	High
Equity	High
Culture of Collective Stewardship	High
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	High
Maintenance & Labor	Medium

[1] https://environmentamerica.org/center/resources/trash-in-america-2/

- Education and transparency needs to follow this too: maybe via an Instagram reel on Hunter USG and Hunter's platforms, informing about the availability of these bins and how to use them
- Integrate compost bin into a centralized waste system
- Identify and select rat-proof compost bins
- Ensure proper signage (e.g. same design as DSNY brown bins) on what to compost on campus to avoid cross-contamination
- With the addition of composting infrastructure, there needs to be education rolled out with it too:
    - Have incoming students at orientation learn about composting programs and how to compost around Hunter during their tour
    - Put up posters and newsletters talking about Hunter's sustainability initiatives especially surrounding composting (helps encourage behavior towards composting, seeing that it's actually being implemented and brings change)
    - Switching from single-use plastics to more recyclable/compostable materials (increases ease of composting)
    - Incentives
- Compost bins absolutely need a lid you need to lift open and close to use. It makes throwing waste in there more effortful, requiring more thinking
- Post signage for students to "Stop and Think If This is Waste" and if it is going into the correct bin

#4 — In-House Composting Infrastructure: 80.77% Support

Invest in resources for in-house infrastructure for composting

- Acquire an in-vessel composter, which will compost food waste on site.
- Explore partnerships to supplement compost pickup – such as through Central Park Conservancy and Big Reuse's recent collaboration for on-site composting at Central Park
- The President's Office must provide funding for 2-5 paid student Sustainability Fellows
  - Continuing this compost initiative relies on having a consistent base of student workers to ensure daily monitoring and maintenance of compost bins. Incentives needed for those working with composting to continue doing this work, especially paying them! → Training paid student workers to lead and promote sustainable practices like composting/maintenance of composting bins
  - Collaborate with professors who are interested in the cause
- The President's Office must investigate the benefits/costs of an in-vessel composter, which will compost food waste on site.
  - The Rocket or another type of centralized storage system for composting
  - How will compost be dealt with afterwards? → Community gardens, potential partnership with Central Park Conservancy to utilize compost produced at Hunter College
  - DSNY curbside compost pickup one-day only (PEAT for the pilot program)

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?

- Increase organics waste diversion in order to meet waste diversion goals (institutional and state)

Primary Score		
Votes		**Percent**
Strongly Agree	10	38.46%
Somewhat Agree	11	42.31%
Neutral / Don't Know	0	0.00%
Somewhat Disagree	4	15.38%
Strongly Disagree	1	3.85%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	Medium
Sustainability	High
Equity	Medium
Culture of Collective Stewardship	Medium
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	High
Maintenance & Labor	Medium

#5 — Single Use Plastic Reduction: 92.31% Support

Eliminate single-use plastic and styrofoam waste from food service providers on campus

- Food service providers (Campus Eats) on campus should replace plastic and foam serviceware (containers, cups, utensils, straws, etc.) with compostable/reuseable containers
- Eliminate sales of plastic water bottles (Campus Eats)
- Eliminate use and distribution of plastic bags
- Provide reusable cups and dishware (Possible grant opportunities offered by the PLAN organization allowing for a free analysis on reusable dishware)
- Require food service providers (Campus Eats) to provide compostable options of single-use serviceware
- Revisit the Single-Use Plastics Reduction Plan and further progress on it
- Collaborate with popular staple food trucks (Coffee Truck, Hunter Halal, Terry and Yaki) outside Hunter to eliminate their single-use serviceware

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?

- Divert single-use plastic and foam serviceware to organics waste stream
- Increase organics waste diversion in order to meet waste diversion goals (institutional and state).
- Eliminate issue of plastics contamination in recycling bins (plastics require washing in order to be properly recycled)
- Around 80% of survey respondents dine on campus (sum of respondents who answered “always,” “most of the time,” “about half the time,” and “sometimes”)
- Students bring in single-use serviceware from food trucks right outside Hunter; Brings up the need to implement the program with nearby food trucks

Any specifications or must-haves related to this idea?

- Consult with Hunter College legal team on amending service vendor contracts upon renewal

Primary Score		
Votes		**Percent**
Strongly Agree	16	61.54%
Somewhat Agree	8	30.77%
Neutral / Don't Know	2	7.69%
Somewhat Disagree	0	0.00%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	Medium
Sustainability	High
Equity	Medium
Culture of Collective Stewardship	High
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	High
Maintenance & Labor	Medium

- In the future, explore potential options for private service vendors that offer borrowing program (loan system) for reusable serviceware
- Experts recommended to implement a dishwasher to clean reusable serviceware stating it would be beneficial

#6 — Sustainability Working Group: 92.31% Support

Launching a paid sustainability working group led by approx. 5-7 students, pay and hours TBC. We recommend this instead of a student club, because working groups have the ability to compensate students for labor. The working group would focus on research (for example: students trained by DSNY or PLAN to conduct waste audits), data collection and event coordination that supports sustainability culture and works towards a zero-waste campus.

It would also provide volunteer and education opportunities. Volunteering opportunities would ideally come along with some sort of incentive, i.e extra credit, volunteer hours, certified training certificates. Volunteer work would include organizing events, increasing outreach, designing semester waste audits and using the data gathered for project grant applications. E.g seeing waste contamination, to improve recycling and show need for compost. DSNY can train us to use waste audit skills. This working group would design/manage knowledge systems to document the previous work that's been done, ongoing progress, etc.

- Reach out to former students and staff of past waste/sustainability clubs/initiatives to figure out what worked and what didn't.
- Train students in all roles in the working group to maintain working group over time.
- Have advisors help with institutional memory of club/archives, and guidance
- Work closely with post assembly members of CCAP

There is an opportunity to add this initiative for funding into the existing agreement/contract with the Mellon Foundation, further investigation into grants/ outside funding will fall under the purview of the working group.

Kendra's Idea - individual donor/recruitment dollars, bake into financial aid and student interests and incentive to attend

Primary Score		
Votes		Percent
Strongly Agree	16	61.54%
Somewhat Agree	8	30.77%
Neutral / Don't Know	1	3.85%
Somewhat Disagree	0	0.00%
Strongly Disagree	1	3.85%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	Medium
Sustainability	High
Equity	Medium
Culture of Collective Stewardship	High
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	High
Maintenance & Labor	Medium

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?

- Increase awareness and student engagement
- Changes campus culture
- Gives students a way to hold admin accountable
- Lessens burden on custodial staff by leaning on students
- Workforce development for students/gain transferable skills
- CCAP would have a paid working force to continue to advance its goals and recommendations
- In the future, explore potential options for private service vendors that offer borrowing program (loan system) for reusable serviceware
- Experts recommended to implement a dishwasher to clean reusable serviceware stating it would be beneficial

Any specifications or must-haves related to this idea?

- Sustainability newsletter
- Financial incentives for students
- Give students the ability to voice concerns directly with administration
- Waste audits
- Zero waste trainings

#7 — Education: Trash Talk (Orientation): 96.15% Support

The Hunter Green Team will use The Green Initiative Fund to implement an engaging educational segment on sustainability and waste management during orientation. The Green Team will inform students of Hunter's waste capacities, functions, goals, and etiquette.

Additionally, a short (3-4 minute) Brightspace module will be designed for orientation students, preferably in the form of a game similar to the DSNY sorting website.

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?
This will use existing infrastructure to engage students in a way that both educates and creates more incentive for sustainable practices on campus.

Any specifications or must-haves related to this idea?

- New students will be presented with a waste-sorting game with small prizes (candy, reusable merch, and/or gift cards)
- Orientation leaders will show students some waste facilities during the already-existing tour of the campus.
- An information packet containing the Hunter College Annual Sustainability Progress Report as well as a list of courses focused on sustainability within each department.
- Upon completion of the educational Brightspace module on waste; students will be automatically enrolled into a raffle for a chance to win a monetary incentive
- Promote and expand the sip and save program where students can save money on beverages based on how many times they've reused.

Primary Score		
Votes		**Percent**
Strongly Agree	16	61.54%
Somewhat Agree	9	34.62%
Neutral / Don't Know	1	3.85%
Somewhat Disagree	0	0.00%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	High
Sustainability	High
Equity	High
Culture of Collective Stewardship	High
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	High
Maintenance & Labor	Medium

#8 — Green Week: 73.08% Support

Note: Recommendation #8 did not make the 75% Supermajority Threshold

Individual donors could give funds that go directly towards students. Recruitment dollars to engage students already passionate about green initiatives. Utilizing the The Green Initiative Fund, a group of students a part of the Green Team will be paid and given the resources to organize a Green Week (3-5 days). This would involve organizing sustainability events such as a clothing swap, repair fair, planting/gardening, lending library, etc.

They will encourage academic departments and student clubs to engage with creative tasks related to sustainability, such as but not limited to: (1) The Theater department putting on a sustainability themed play (2) The Fashion department doing a fashion show with recyclable materials (3) The Geography/Environmental Science department could do a writing contest about environmental issues. (4) The Math department creating an infographic about sustainability issues. (5) The photography club hosting a photography contest, etc. With each department having incentives for high performers and those who contributed greatly.

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?
This will use existing infrastructure to engage students in a way that both educates and creates more incentive for sustainable practices on campus.

Any specifications or must-haves related to this idea?

- Contributes to education through hands-on, peer-to-peer engagement that will have a more lasting impact on culture.
- Gives students an outlet for difficult to recycle materials.
- Different departments have the chance to work on this initiative. Information coming from individuals with knowledge in different backgrounds. Unity is key to progress!

Primary Score		
Votes		**Percent**
Strongly Agree	6	23.08%
Somewhat Agree	13	50.00%
Neutral / Don't Know	4	15.38%
Somewhat Disagree	2	7.69%
Strongly Disagree	1	3.85%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	High
Sustainability	Medium
Equity	High
Culture of Collective Stewardship	High
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	High
Maintenance & Labor	Medium

#9 — Paper Towel Reduction: 61.54% Support

Note: Recommendation #8 did not make the 75% Supermajority Threshold

Decrease the use of paper towels in restrooms through introducing more hand dryers

- Invest in more hand dryers for every bathroom. Not every bathroom has a hand dryer.
- Improve hand dryers' drying capability as well as reduce noise
- Focus on installing anti-microbial hand dryers
- If not cost-effective to replace all paper towels with improved hand dryers, introduce biodegradable paper towels and specific bins for them in the restrooms
- Possibly implement bidets in restrooms for those who prefer them as well as to reduce use of toilet paper

Why is this important? Why should this idea be prioritized?

- Incredible cost to stock every restroom in the entire building with paper towels consistently
- Trash bins overflowing with paper towels have been seen continuously in the restrooms
- Electric hand dryers would help to eliminate paper towel waste
- Upfront cost for hand dryers that would payoff overtime
- Free up a portion of custodian time to attend to other sources of waste

Any specifications or must-haves related to this idea?

- Electric hand dryers are excessively loud in specified silent areas such as the library
- Germ and bacteria issues were raised with current outdated hand dryers
- Questions on upkeep and repairs on equipment can be raised
- The need/want for bidets have not been surveyed yet

Primary Score		
Votes		Percent
Strongly Agree	8	30.77%
Somewhat Agree	8	30.77%
Neutral / Don't Know	3	11.54%
Somewhat Disagree	6	23.08%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%

Value Alignment Score	
Education	Low
Sustainability	High
Equity	Medium
Culture of Collective Stewardship	Medium
Institutional Transparency / Accountability	Medium
Maintenance & Labor	Medium

Concluding Remarks

The CUNY Climate Assembly Project was the first climate assembly to take place in an U.S. university. The participation, support, and publicity that CCAP received collectively support our hypothesis that climate assemblies can engage university students through a process of deep collaborative inquiry and dialogue and prepare them to participate in future democratic decision-making and civil society.

The project would not have been possible without its organizers, including the CCAP Governance Committees (Institutional/Impact Committees, Learning Content Committee, Assembly Design Committee, External Evaluation and Review Committees), the Small Group Facilitators, the Assembly Delegates, and the invited speakers who donated their time and expertise to the process.

We would also like to acknowledge the attendees of our public events, all the survey participants, the instructors and students who used the CCAP curriculum, and every Hunter student who applied to serve as a CCAP delegate. Thanks also to those who moved behind the scenes during the process to make everything possible (AV technicians, caterers, custodial staff, administrators, security, and other guests).

Findings from The CUNY Climate Assembly Project indicate that university-based climate assemblies have the potential to promote participatory decision-making and produce democratic solutions to concrete problems, such as waste management. Moreover, by promoting collaborative deliberation based on experience, connection, and self-efficacy, initiatives such as CCAP show that the Humanities play an important role in preparing confident and capable students for civic life.

Additional research and funding for university-based climate assembly projects are warranted, given their potential to promote student engagement, learning, and optimism about the future. The CCAP process yielded concrete solutions to important waste management challenges at Hunter College. It also fostered camaraderie and a deep understanding of the process among participants. We hope the CUNY Climate Assembly Project can serve as a model for other institutions exploring pathways towards innovative democracy and participatory decision-makin



CUNY Climate Assembly Project

centerforthehumanities.org/project/cuny-climate-assembly-project

August 2026