

Community Engagement Survey

Executive Summary

The **Harlem Community Engagement Survey** was conducted by the 125th Street Business Improvement District to gather **resident, worker, and visitor input** that will help shape a future **wayfinding and visitor experience strategy** for Harlem, with a focus on the **125th Street corridor**. Responses show **strong community honor** and a deep connection to Harlem as both a **historic cultural center** and a **vibrant everyday neighborhood**.

Participants consistently identified Harlem's greatest strengths as its **people, culture, history, architecture, parks, and iconic institutions** such as the **Apollo Theater, Schomburg Center, Studio Museum, Sylvia's, Harlem State Office Building, A-Loft Hotel, Marcus Garvey Park, Morningside Park, Rucker Park, Central Park, Riverbank State Park, St. Nicholas Park, Jefferson Park, Richard Rodgers Amphitheater, Malcolm Shabazz Harlem Market, Statues on 8th Avenue and Lenox Avenue, The Abyssinian Baptist Church, The Renaissance Hotel, and the National Urban League Civil Rights Museum**. Many respondents emphasized that Harlem is **not simply a destination to visit, but a living community with global significance**.

125th Street was widely described as Harlem's **central spine**, serving as the district's primary corridor for **shopping, transit, culture, services, and community activity**. As Harlem's most visible and active corridor, respondents see 125th Street as the



ideal location for improvements that benefit both **residents and visitors**.

The survey also revealed **broad support for enhanced wayfinding tools**. Respondents requested **clearer directional signage, neighborhood maps, landmark identification, transit guidance, digital tools, and historical interpretation**. Many participants noted that navigating **west-east connections**, understanding **transit options**, and locating destinations can be challenging for newcomers and occasional visitors.

In addition to navigation, respondents highlighted several **quality-of-life concerns** including **traffic congestion, slow buses, double parking, sidewalk crowding, cleanliness, and safety issues**. These findings reinforce that successful wayfinding should not only attract visitors, but also **improve everyday usability for residents and workers**.

Overall, the survey suggests a clear strategic direction: Harlem welcomes **thoughtful investment** when it **respects local identity** and **serves community needs first**. Future wayfinding and programming efforts should **celebrate Harlem's cultural legacy, support local businesses, improve daily mobility, and create a more welcoming and legible district experience**.

The strongest opportunity is to position Harlem not only as a **historic destination**, but as a **thriving neighborhood where legacy, culture, and daily life continue to shape one of New York City's most important communities**.

Findings Summary

Project: Harlem Wayfinding & Visitor Experience Strategy

Survey Period: February 2026

Lead Partner: Harlem BID

Purpose: Gather resident, worker, and visitor input to guide programming, wayfinding priorities, and future placemaking investments.

1. Survey Overview

The survey captured feedback from Harlem residents, employees, nearby neighbors, and visitors regarding:

- Transportation patterns
- Navigational challenges
- Desired wayfinding improvements
- Harlem's most valued assets
- Reasons for visiting 125th Street and Harlem
- Ideas for improving the district experience

Responses were heavily weighted toward **local residents and workers**, providing strong community-grounded insight.

2. Key Respondent Snapshot

Relationship to Harlem

Strong majority of respondents indicated:

- Live in Harlem
- Live and work in Harlem
- Work in Harlem
- Live nearby and visit often

This suggests findings reflect **daily lived experience**, not just tourist impressions.

Travel Modes Most Used

Most common transportation methods:

1. Subway (2/3, A/B/C/D, 4/5/6)
2. Bus (M60, M101, M102, M125, M3, M10)
3. Car / rideshare
4. Walking
5. Citi Bike / bicycle

3. Major Findings

A. Harlem Is Viewed as a Place of Deep Identity and Honor

Repeated themes:

- “Harlem is home”
- Strong cultural identity
- Black excellence and legacy
- Architecture and brownstones
- Music and arts history
- Community pride
- Welcoming energy

Many respondents emphasized Harlem is **not simply a destination, but a living neighborhood**.

Most Frequently Mentioned Unique Assets

1. Apollo Theater
2. Schomburg Center
3. Studio Museum
4. Parks (Marcus Garvey, Morningside, St. Nicholas)
5. Restaurants / food culture

6. Historic architecture
7. Community spirit

B. 125th Street Is Seen as Harlem's Main Spine

Respondents described 125th Street as:

- Harlem's commercial center
- Main transit corridor
- Cultural gateway
- Shopping destination
- Place for daily errands
- Meeting point for locals and visitors

It functions as Harlem's **Main Street** and regional arrival corridor.

C. Wayfinding Is Needed and Broadly Supported

A strong majority supported more street-level wayfinding elements.

Most requested improvements:

Physical Signage

- Clear West / East directional signs
- Avenue names + numbered avenue references
- Landmark signage
- Historic district markers
- Better building numbers
- Pedestrian maps

Transit Navigation

- Better bus route explanations
- Clear local vs express bus signage
- Real-time arrivals
- Easier subway exits orientation

Digital Tools and More Wayfinding Resources

Several respondents expressed the need for more tools, signage, and resources to “explain Harlem’s history and cultural roots, provide more accurate subway and bus estimated arrival time, and promote key festivities/celebrations with local businesses to appeal to local citizens, visitors, and tourists.”

Most requested resources:

- Neighborhood and Interactive Maps
- App
- Digital monitors at Intersections
- Historical Walking Tours
- Navigational Signage and Cues
- Event Calendars
- Translated directions

D. Current Pain Points

Transportation Frustrations

Most common complaints:

1. Slow or unreliable buses
2. Congestion on 125th Street
3. Double parking
4. Difficulty crossing west – east Harlem
5. Confusing bus transfers
6. Limited parking