New York Museum of Sanitation
Educate, Promote, Celebrate
Waste has haunted a city like New York since its origin. New Yorkers create waste every day and will continue to do so as long as New York City (NYC) exists. Waste touches everyone and every aspect of life in the city. We produce it, discard it, and try to ignore it. We slide it down an apartment’s trash chute and never think of it again. However, as soon as garbage disappears from our sight, an unseen corps of dedicated workers takes over, seamlessly removing our waste as we go on to produce more to discard. We only notice these workers when something goes wrong — a crushed trash can, something spilled on the pavement, a heap of trash bags, autumn leaves piling up at the curb, abandoned tires, or lingering debris from last week’s storm.

Puzzling as they may be, these are but occasional lapses compared to the ten thousand tons of trash that are successfully picked up and processed every day in NYC. A planning and execution miracle occurs daily at curbsides, and the tons of trash we collectively produce seem just to go away.

Discarded stuff presents a serious economic, social, and environmental problem that must be made more visible in the collective consciousness along with the crews and sanitation systems that confront this issue every day. As responsible citizens of a modern metropolis, New Yorkers must set a global example for reducing and better managing waste, both individually and as a community.

The New York Museum of Sanitation will be dedicated to supporting responsible citizens in that effort. It will be a destination to learn, share ideas, and shape behavior; a space to interact, have fun, and discover how to make

“It has been found, that within this City of Amsterdam in [New Netherland] manyburghers and inhabitants throw their rubbish, filth, ashes, dead animals and suchlike things into the public streets to the great inconvenience of the community,”

New Amsterdam ordinance
dated February 20, 1657

Why does NYC require and deserve a Museum of Sanitation?
Because NYC is the model, the case study to lead the way in responsible waste reduction and management. To paraphrase the great Sinatra, “if you can make it there you can make it anywhere, it’s up to you, New York.”

Central Questions that will be addressed:

- What is the story of waste and waste management for NYC?
- What is the character, scale, and meaning of waste and waste management for NYC?
- Why are waste issues and their consequences and solution so urgent now?
- Who are the waste warriors and heroes, who manages your waste and how do they do it?
- When a disaster strikes NYC, who runs towards it?
- What does it mean to be a responsible “waste citizen”, what can you do to help?
The Sanitation Foundation will partner with DSNY and civil society to establish a sustainable New York Museum of Sanitation to:

- Educate the public about vital social, environmental, and economic issues related to the origin, management, and disposal of waste, using NYC as a case study for issues that span the globe.
- Galvanize a public movement to reduce NYC’s waste at its source by creating informed, motivated, and responsible citizens and educating individuals, families, schools, and neighborhoods to reduce, recycle, and compost their waste.
- Celebrate the courageous, creative, and committed workforce of DSNY and demonstrate their direct impact on the health, safety, cleanliness, and livability of NYC.
- Implement and evaluate innovative school programs that demonstrably improve the STEAM and sustainability initiatives in NYC schools.
- Convene artists, thought-leaders, academics, experts and citizens to foster innovative waste solutions for a sustainable and healthy NYC.

mission

To educate the public about, and create communities dedicated to waste reduction and management; to promote sustainable solutions for New York City’s waste issues; and to celebrate DSNY’s vital role in maintaining a healthy, safe, clean, and livable city.
The New York Museum of Sanitation project needs to focus its purpose on what it can do best — telling the story of the past, the present, and the future of waste in NYC. The Museum aspires to be a leader in a learning network that looks at waste issues and solutions beyond NYC, perhaps as part of a consortium of like-minded and policy-oriented regional and national institutions.

In order to achieve its core educational purpose, the New York Museum of Sanitation must partner with the NYC Department of Education and its teachers; local universities; NYC government agencies; and other environmental groups focused on waste-related issues such as plastic pollution and environmental degradation. In fact, the New York Museum of Sanitation cannot achieve its purpose alone and cannot tell the far-reaching story of waste and its consequences without the active cooperation of a network of engaged organizations and community leaders. The Museum must see itself as a hub in a learning network, reaching out actually and digitally to deliver its educational messages and materials. For that reason, this Statement of Purpose reflects input from community leaders, DSNY staff, and academic experts who provided critical perspectives on the project and what it can and must do.
What are the target audiences?

It is always difficult to prioritize target audiences since all are welcome to participate in the activities of a museum and enjoy its educational experiences. However, to better tailor those activities and their outcomes, it is indispensable to identify in a rigorous way the critical audiences who must be served and motivated by the efforts of the museum. With that in mind, the following are the target audiences for the museum:

Primary Audience: Families with children

A grassroot movement to reduce and better manage waste will be sparked by committed families and their children. This group represents the necessary advocates for the museum and the main beneficiaries of its educational initiatives. Motivated and informed children will communicate and challenge their parents to adopt new behaviors in their homes and neighborhoods and become the responsible waste-aware citizens of tomorrow. As primary recipients of the services of DSNY, families are a critical support group to acknowledge and appreciate what DSNY provides for their community on a daily basis. With greater awareness of what DSNY does, families can come to appreciate its employees’ critical contribution to the well-being of the city.
Secondary Audience: Middle School Children (grades 6-8) and their Teachers

While all school children will be important visitors for the museum, middle school children will be a priority target audience. It is in the middle school curriculum that civic responsibilities are emphasized, in the hope of shaping a life-long sense of community and good citizenship. Issues of sustainability and the environmental impact of everyday behavior can become living lessons. What does it mean to be a responsible citizen? What issues of my city and neighborhood can I become involved in? How can I make a difference? These questions are emphasized as the academic curriculum turns to civic engagement issues. Middle school is also the time when students begin exploring possible career orientations and are thus able to appreciate community-oriented professions such as police, fire fighters, nurses, and sanitation workers. Waste-related stories and activities can be easily integrated into the curriculum and learning standards of middle school, especially STEAM education where the science, technology, art and engineering aspects of waste issues can be made concrete at the New York Museum of Sanitation. By providing educational experiences that directly support classroom and school building needs, the museum will ensure that educational materials are used in NYC schools. Professional training and easy-to-use teaching materials will need to be created with direct input by teachers to guarantee the continued relevance of the New York Museum of Sanitation and its educational mission. This educational material will also further a central purpose for the museum — to celebrate the dedication and professionalism of the employees of the Department of Sanitation.

Tertiary Audience: Life-long Learners

The New York Museum of Sanitation is determined to raise awareness about waste issues and solutions for NYC. Reaching adult audiences is critical to delivering positive and trustworthy content in this domain. The New York Museum of Sanitation aspires to be a public forum where those issues and solutions can be discussed and debated. Whether actually or digitally, the museum wants to engage the adult community in shaping policies and practices that will improve NYC’s waste reduction and waste management program. Informed citizens can learn how to become responsible “waste-aware citizens” at the museum — and find there a venue where their voice can be heard.

Tertiary Audience: Policy and Decision-makers

The New York Museum of Sanitation aspires to be a platform to bring the community together to frame waste issues and solutions for NYC. Creative and forward-looking, the museum will provide innovative directions for the reduction and management of waste. Partnering with NYC government agencies and community representatives, the museum is dedicated to being an active forum where influencers and community leaders can collaborate on improving the policies, practices, and the effectiveness of NYC waste reduction and management efforts. The Covid pandemic has cast a sharp light on the life-and-death importance of inter-agency cooperation in health and sanitation matters at the local level; the New York Museum of Sanitation will keep that mindset alive in better times.
It is important to have fun learning about waste issues, but it is also important to take NYC's waste issues seriously — and learn how one can help.

Waste is an urgent social, economic, and environmental issue for NYC that touches every citizen every day.

The New York Museum of Sanitation is a forum to publicly debate and confront waste issues from waste policy, to climate change, systemic change, and any other relevant issues big and small.

Responsible “waste-aware citizens” can make a difference in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and the entire city.

The unsung “heroes at the curb” and the dedicated employees of DSNY deserve recognition and appreciation. Their courage, dedication, and professionalism tackle the enormous task of managing NYC’s waste every day.

What key take away messages must be delivered to visitors to the Museum and its programs?
What feelings, beliefs, attitudes, or knowledge does the Museum aspire to change?

Core Learning Objectives: What feelings, beliefs, attitudes, or knowledge does the Museum aspire to change in its audiences? How will learners be different after experiencing the Museum of Sanitation? How can the educational impact be measured? What will learners be able to describe, explain, compare, or list that they could not before experiencing the museum?

• To describe the story and history of NYC’s waste management and how it has improved over time.
• To describe the scale and character of NYC’s waste problem.
• To explain where waste comes from and where it goes.
• To explain the relationship between waste and environmental issues like plastic pollution, habitat destruction, and environmental degradation.
• To describe how DSNY and its workforce tackle NYC’s waste every day.
• To describe the role of DSNY in handling NYC disasters like snowstorms, hurricanes, 9/11, the Covid pandemic.
• To explain every citizen’s role and responsibilities as a waste producer.
• To list specific ways responsible citizens can help and make a difference in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and city.
• To list specific ways DSNY employees keep NYC a healthy, safe, clean, and livable city.
• To describe the costs and benefits of recycling and composting.

Join Us Today
maggie@sanitationfoundation.org
For more information, contact Maggie Lee at maggie@sanitationfoundation.org or visit sanitationfoundation.org/museum