

## **Manhattan Community Board 11 2023 Election Questionnaire**

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We'd like to inform you that your responses will be made public on the CB11 website. As such, please avoid including any personal, identifying, or sensitive information. If you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us for clarification.

### **Q1: What is your full name?**

A: Xavier A. Santiago

### **Q2: What position are you running for?**

A: Chair

### **Q3: What is the role of this position as a Board Officer?**

A: Thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve as the Chair of Community Board 11. Beyond the defined responsibilities within our Bylaws, the Chair serves as an externalized front-facing officer that advances the work of the board. As its duly elected leader, the Chair provides insight to the board leadership and broader board as it pertains to the community's needs through a variety of meetings with city and state agencies, elected legislators and community-based organizations.

### **Q4: What skills and experience do you possess that qualify you for this position?**

A: As a producer in film and television, the skillsets naturally and synergistically align with the requirements of the position of Chair. Using my skill-set as a producer to work with the membership has been a rewarding experience. Producers manage a high-pressure environment during every step of production (see CV). From feature films to commercials, the producer manages the complex line-item budgets, capital campaigns, contract negotiations and delicate relationships; all of which require masterful organization to create a successful project. From concept to delivery of the final project to the distributors to campaigning the film for successful returns, the producer maintains focus on the long-term goals and all the steps to achieve successful results. During my time as Chair, many of these "producer's skills" of deductive reasoning, predictive awareness and understanding the intricacies of interpersonal relationships (especially those with competing interests) have evolved and become more refined in efficacy. With every new project, a new team is assembled. Like a successful Chair, a producer maintains the fluidity to listen and adapt, assess strengths and complimentary focuses, and from there make assessments to create an efficient team. During this term, we have further organized and focused Community Board 11 to achieve our true goals of advocacy. As Chair, I have utilized these skills to encourage our membership to lobby elected officials or negotiate with agency heads; all the while, assisting our committees to work together on collaborative projects/goals. Furthermore, as Chair, my skills have afforded a long-term outlook and productivity of the board. Much like producing a trilogy, it is my hope that my skills as a producer may continue in delivering the next installment to the community through my service as Chair.

**Q5: How do you view leadership? Check all that apply.**

- √ Leadership helps bring people together.
- √ Leadership is working with a team to get things done.  
Leadership is telling people what to do to get things done.
- √ Leadership takes years to develop.
- √ Everyone is a leader.  
Leadership is stepping back and allowing people to lead.  
Leadership is giving your team the vision and telling them to execute it.  
Leaders run the show.
- √ Leadership is a supportive role.

**Please explain:**

There are various forms of leadership and each style is dependent on the type of organizational structure and its overall goals. However, in the context of community boards, the Chair serves as an elected leader who not only guides the organization but informs the board's work through direct engagement with the external community leadership organizations, elected representatives and more. As a leader in this context, it remains imperative to unify the organization, even if there are competing interests, around the issues facing our community. In order to do so, one must lead by example in doing the work and that includes cultivating and nurturing new leaders on the board. Some may choose to take on the responsibility of leadership and most have the potential to do so, but it must be a conscious choice. My goal this term is to offload much of the knowledge I have gained through the many years of service and the institutional knowledge given to me by prior community board members. Concurrently, we will build on the current leadership and develop future potential leaders of Community Board 11.

**Q6: How long have you been a member of the Community Board?**

A: Previously I served from 2009 to 2012. I returned to board service in 2015 and am currently serving our community for a total of 11 years.

**Q7. What is your leadership background in terms of managing successful projects? Please provide an example of one project you've managed. What was the outcome?**

A: As expressed above, each film or television project is an independent business and is judged by its success in the marketplace. Our company has held a wide array of successful projects over the course of nearly twenty years. Applying the leadership skills from that business model to community board service, one of our prouder projects was the CoreNet CB11 Affordable Housing Forum. Working with two former board members, Jeremiah Schlotman and Henry Flores, we created the first private/public Community Board 11 forum that pulled back the curtain on how affordable housing is created. As the Vice-Chair at the time, I worked with the Housing Committee and predominantly Jeremiah and Henry to develop the concept of this forum. As both provided specific skillsets (law and commercial real estate respectively) to the forum, it was important to not overmanage and just enable the success of the project. Because of this approach, our affordable housing developers on the panel provided proprietary modeling to distill the real costs and process to creating affordable housing. To this day, this forum is still referred to as an overall success for its educational efficacy.

**Q8: What is your style of leadership? Please check all that apply.**

- Cross-Cultural Leadership
- Team Leadership
- Facilitative Leadership
- Transformational Leadership
- √ Strategic Leadership Style
- √ Democratic Leadership

**Please expound on your leadership style:**

Depending on the nature of our goals, each of these styles can be applied. For general purposes, a style that merges both a Democratic and Strategic approach is best applied to my style. By building consensus through an informed and educated modeling, Community Board 11 is better prepared for tackling the issues of the day. As an organization, we can develop a strategic approach to engaging our agencies, elected representatives and more importantly, the community we serve.

**Q9: How would you ensure that you have an effective relationship with the full board? How would you ensure that the board maintains its independence to act despite the political allegiances of its membership?**

A:

The Community Board and by extension its work should always be removed from political allegiances. It is our work that should guide and direct the policy decisions of our elected politicians. To pull a page from the book of Gale (our former Borough President, Gale Brewer), when asked what her position was on a subject, she would retort, "What is the position of the community board?" It is imperative that each board member be devoted to this community and remain independent of their political allegiances and preferences. I would gently remind each member that they must maintain objectivity and if they cannot do so, they should recuse themselves.

Those that had not received instruction at the MBPO's training series would be encouraged to attend. There is no shame if a political allegiance exists but each member must act for the betterment of our entire community – even if a conflict manifests. As expressed earlier, if an honest and open dialogue exists between the membership and the officers, then we can prevent most conflicts from arising. Equally so, if the membership has built upon the trust and connection through proper communication and developed a foundation of trust, they will feel more inclined to share their challenges if they arise. This would allow for full independence. I would also remind the members that even their own political ambitions and allegiances therein should be set aside for the greater good of the community. As Chair, I will continue serving with nothing less than a careful and considered approach to maintaining our independence and will encourage the membership to do the same.

**Q10: How would you address or mediate conflict within the (1) Board? (2) the broader community we serve?**

As we have returned to in-person meetings, the veil of the virtual space has been lifted. Even in normal circumstances, conflict can arise from differences in opinions; however, during our hybrid settings, we have witnessed additional strife with our more contentious issues. As I have addressed in the past, taking a direct and empathetic approach often works toward board and community conflict resolution. Reminding all that we are more than just our opinions and that we will not agree on 100% of all issues but that our core goal remains focused on uplifting the community. In the instances that we have encountered, we must always lean in. As I have practiced for the nearly six years as a senior leader, I embrace the conflict in a caring and compassionate manner to find tenable goals we all may agree to but only in a respectful fashion.

**Q11: How do you collaborate to create productive partnerships within (1) Board? (2) the broader community we serve?**

We better foster relationships by creating multiple lines of communication. All too often, many partnerships are treated in a transactional fashion versus being of service. The latter approach is a long-term style of partnership building that engenders good will and support through defined actions that the other party may benefit from. This applies to both the Board partnerships and our community partnerships. When approaching each to offer assistance without the expectation of reciprocation, one builds affinity with that partner. As a result, they feel more inclined to assist with our community board work.

**Q12: What are the top 3 issues facing East Harlem? How will you be effective in addressing these issues individually, within Executive Committee and as a full board?**

A: Many issues we face are interconnected and should not be compartmentalized when recommending policy. In order to solve one, we must address them all. Housing Insecurity, Youth/Gang Epidemic and the Opioid Crisis influence one another. These issues should be addressed in a concerted multipronged approach. These circumstances arose from the affordability-housing crisis which left many people homeless. Combined with the dilapidated state of NYCHA, our youth and those suffering addiction interact and are affected with the cycle. Many of our youth are substituting crews/gangs for their families as the high costs of living remove the presence of at least one parent (noted recently in the press). Our youth are being taken advantage of and groomed as young as eight by those who hold no interest in their upward mobility. Couple this reality with the growing opioid crisis and a perfect storm occurs. Those suffering with addiction are often without shelter and lack assistance to recover from the disease. Although there are multiple research papers addressing these issues, it leaves the question of what policy and action can our CB11 create.

Each committee should unite through their work. The Executive Committee should assess these issues and assign an outreach wing to assess the current state, a policy wing that involves holistic solutions and draft proposals that cross-pollinate the related committees and create actionable projects. CB11 should advocate for revitalization of programs such as Mitchell Llama, HPD Lotteries and the restoration of NYCHA funding that meet our community's economic bands, while supporting legislation through innovative public/private partnerships to develop affordable housing that can be integrated with new development.

Those who need reintegration and retraining are not engaged in a supportive manner. Studies have demonstrated when more people are adequately employed, crime statistics trend downward and community moral uplifts. Programs that intervene on behalf of our youth to create pipelines for success must be engaged. There are multiple CBOs who focus on these issues but the community remains in the dark. Equally so with the HRA and DHS, pressing these agencies to deliver results that go further than subduing symptoms. A policy shift germinating from CB11 should advocate for equalization of services and support modalities for those at risk in our community and push the City for fair share of programs. CB11 can and will service as that educational and activating force shining a light of awareness for the community and then remain as the connective tissue for years to come. It is my hope that you will allow me to continue my service as Chair and see these goals through to the end.

