

Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2020 District Leader Candidate Questionnaire

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Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability:

1) Why do you seek an endorsement from CBID?

CBID has a rich and established history as a force for democratic organizing in Central Brooklyn. My time at CBID events, in conversation with CBID members, and even reviewing and responding to questions in this questionnaire, consistently point to CBID's deep commitment to our local community. That commitment is obvious not just by the extent to which members show up to engage and do the work, but is also made clear by the nuance and precision of the issues members bring to the fore. I sincerely appreciate CBID's leadership in pushing the conversation about what does (and does not) fall within the control of a District Leader, and how election results for these seats can have a concrete effect on our local democracy. I hope an endorsement could lead to an ongoing partnership in which we can shape that narrative and make it happen together.

In a more transactional sense, an early endorsement from CBID would be a boon to my campaign. It would be instrumental in bringing awareness about my candidacy and campaign priorities to critical communities. I'd value a vote of confidence from CBID highly, and would be thrilled to build this partnership.

2) Will you vote for Frank Seddio to be Chair of the Kings County Democratic Party? Explain your decision.

I'm running for District Leader to work to make the local democratic party more [inclusive, accessible, and transparent](#). In my time as an organizer and County Committee member, I have not seen Frank Seddio prioritize these values in his actions or decisions. Therefore, based on my past experience and information currently available to me, I find it unlikely I would vote for Frank Seddio to be chair.

In terms of **transparency**, how people and organizations spend their time and money shows us what they value. Since 2013, the Party has spent \$300,000 on a public relations firm. When County Committee members have asked for a better understanding of how Party funds are used, they've been dismissively told to read the mandatory state legal filings. I want to be part of an organization that values its members and invests in educating them about expenditures that are crucial to the mission of the organization. Publishing meeting agendas, vote counts, information on processes for judge selection, and special election decisions are also all critical for a transparent party.

Regarding **accessibility**, I'd like to see the Party direct funds to update its own infrastructure, such as improving its website, email, and mailing strategies to communicate directly with the members of County Committee and Democrats across the borough. County Committee is the ground floor of the Democratic Party. Anyone who wants to run for a seat should have access to the same information, such as clear instructions on how to run, complete and file petitions, and connect with neighbors who are running. In addition, for County Committee members to be able to meaningfully participate, meetings must be: in locations accessible by public transit, announced with reasonable notice, and organized by agendas that prioritize new business and the functioning of the Party. Local Democrats will be served by these changes as well -- hearings are open to the public, but must also be accessible to fulfill the public mandate value in practice.

Regarding **inclusion**, reforming the proxy process, supporting opportunities for people to participate outside of existing Party structures and political clubs, and advocating for women's rights and gender justice in the

Party are critical. I'd like a Party Chair who not only invites these conversations, but leads and amplifies them.

I'm running for District Leader in the 52nd Assembly District because I believe we can build a relationship of mutual respect and work together to focus on the priorities of all Brooklynites and become the Democratic ideal we are capable of.

3) What do you think are the most important responsibilities of a district leader?

District Leaders are elected, unpaid members of the leadership of the Brooklyn Democratic Party. Each of the 21 assembly districts in Kings County elects two District Leaders (one male, one female) to represent them in the 42-person Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has the power to lead grassroots, progressive party-building activities throughout the county, such as organizing get-out-the-vote efforts, working with the Board of Elections to improve Election Day operations, supporting candidates' campaign operations, and communicating relevant information between registered Democrats in the district and other elected officials.

I believe a District Leader should also be considered a local community liaison between the Democratic Party and their district: someone Assembly residents know they can reach out to with questions or ideas regarding our democratic system at home. I also believe District Leaders are responsible for creating a responsive County Committee network for their district. District Leaders and County Committee members can work together -- checking in with neighbors, discussing district-relevant issues or upcoming elections -- all in the effort of making our home democracy an active, participatory, and responsive space.

4) What changes would you like to see in the operation of the county organization and its rules? What would you like to stay the same?

My vision of the Brooklyn Democratic Party is as a **standard bearer of progressive values** for the rest of the state and country -- where the Party sets the tone and leads the conversation on inclusive practices, transparency, and accountability in its operations. The Party has a responsibility to act as an organization of integrity, where table stakes of operations are following its own rules, encouraging residents to run themselves for County Committee, prioritizing a culture of participation, and taking care and responsibility for all votes. If elected District Leader, I will use my voice to advocate for reforms that are critical to making the Party more responsive to the grassroots. This includes work to:

- Reform the proxy process. Today, the Brooklyn Democratic Party often makes decisions on behalf of all Brooklynites through a proxy vote system that keeps the powerful in power and limits the voice of the electorate. As District Leader, I will be an active member of the effort to reform the proxy process.
- Advocate for women's rights and gender justice in the Party. Getting more women, transgender, and nonbinary people into positions of power starts at the grassroots. We can do this through strategies such as reinvigorating the local Party's women's caucus and restructuring Party positions to include nonbinary people who do not identify as female or male.
- Encourage participation in County Committee meetings. For County Committee members to be able to meaningfully participate, meetings must be: in locations accessible by public transit, announced with reasonable notice, and organized by agendas that prioritize new business and the functioning of the Party.
- Make the local Party more accountable by publishing meeting agendas, recording votes, providing more information on judicial elections, reforming the special election process, making committee appointments transparent, and disclosing Party finances.

The County Party has made many great strides in the past few years as well. For example, at the September

County Committee meeting, together the membership unanimously passed a resolution put forward by Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats, New Kings Democrats, Lambda Independent Democrats, and Independent Neighborhood Democrats -- with the support of County Committee Executive Committee Chair. The resolution called for the Party to convene its Financial Committee, pull together a full report of the Party's financials, and report back to the full County Committee -- that is, to all members, not just leadership.

Relatively recently, the Party also increased the number of County Committee meetings per two-year term, launched a website, and made some portions of their Executive Committee meetings public. This progress gives me great hope for more successes in the future and our ability to come together through collaboration, commitment to our communities, and mutual respect.

5) What, if any, groups or types of people will you not accept campaign contributions from? If so, please note whose money you will not accept.

I will not accept corporate PAC money (though, I also don't anticipate any knocking down my door). I would also not accept money from individuals or entities that have publicly promoted racist, anti-Semitic, transphobic, or otherwise hateful views against oppressed or marginalized groups.

6) Do you support an active Assembly District Committee (ADC) in your Assembly District? Would you support an ADC that operates independently from AD leadership (Assembly member and/or District Leaders)?

An active ADC is one of my key priorities and, I believe, integral for me to be a responsive District Leader. I want to support an ADC that empowers its constituents to engage in conversations about the way the local Party runs, what it prioritizes, and how it can serve as a model of progressive values for the national Party. As District Leader, I would support regular ADC meetings and encourage County Committee members to run and elect their ADC officers, create committees that support the work to engage with 52nd Assembly District Democrats, and empower County Committee members to engage with their neighbors on an ongoing basis.

I believe ADCs have the right to operate independently from AD leadership. As a District Leader, I would consider myself accountable to the ADC: to support their convening, to provide information, and to amplify their priorities.

7) What County Committee proxy reforms do you support?

County Committee members should have access to their vote, regardless of whether they can attend a meeting. However, the current proxy system allows for the centralization of proxies (and power, by extension) within the control of the Party Chair and other members of Executive leadership. There are a variety of methods for insulating against this unilateral control of Party business.

First, I support a rules change that would **limit the number of proxies** each member of the County Committee could hold. I think such a change needs to follow three principles: (1) secure neighborhood voice by limiting proxy designations by some geographic measure, (2) guard against large proxy voting blocs, and (3) prioritize and encourage the physical attendance of members. I would be excited to work with my fellow County Committee members and District Leaders and learn from improved proxy processes such as those enacted in Manhattan to develop an appropriate proxy process for Brooklyn.

Second, Party leadership should **announce any votes** that happen during a meeting ahead of time so that County Committee members can appropriately plan to designate their proxy vote(s).

Third, at the beginning of the meeting, Party leaders should **announce the counts of in-person votes as well as proxy votes**. This will improve transparency and vote-counting procedures later in the meeting.

Fourth, I would work with Party leadership to support **clearer wording of proxies** and information included in such proxies (a la the September 2018 rule change from District Leader Skaller and Assembly Member Carroll, first and second amendment).

9) Do you support a non-binary option for District Leaders and County Committee members? Do you support removing all designations of gender for District Leaders and County Committee members?

Yes. Emilia Decaudin's successful advocacy to amend New York State Party rules to similar effect is an inspiration and testament to the feasibility of doing it here in Brooklyn. New York City-issued birth certificates and IDNYC cards now have a third gender option for non-binary New Yorkers to accurately select their gender. It's time for the local Democratic Party to follow suit.

I am interested in pursuing a plan to remove all designations of gender for District Leaders and County Committee members (as well as such designations in CC officer positions). I believe it is important to maintain gender equity and gender justice in our public offices through our values as well as our practices, not simply through labels and quotas. That being said, I think our local Party needs to seriously examine accessibility issues alongside eliminating gender designations. I would advocate for bringing a racial and gender justice lens to various aspects of our party (e.g., make meeting locations and times accessible, consider childcare options, and reform the proxy process). This type of structural change is necessary to make sure all genders and agendered people can run, win, and participate fully as DLs and CC members.

10) The Census determines how critical resources and political power are distributed. NYS and NYC have historically been undercounted. What action can you take to ensure that New Yorkers, and in particular, members of immigrant communities, are counted? What outreach and educational activities do you have planned?

The Census provides the roots of a strong democracy and an equitable and justice public service system. High quality and representative data are critical to making sure our communities receive the support they need from public health resources to fair and representative redistricting in 2021. Our district has several poorly represented Census tracts (clustered around Gowanus, public housing developments, and immigrant communities); overall, Kings County is one of the two hardest-to-count counties in the state. This hurts our borough's democracy and our access to public and private resources.

Given the crucial role of census data in our political and government systems, **I believe nonpartisan support of Census efforts should be a pillar of our local Democratic Party organizing efforts.** As a candidate for District Leader in 2020 and as someone who believes a District Leader's primary role is as a community representative and liaison, I plan to put my organizing capacity behind Census 2020 work in Assembly District 52 to make sure everyone is counted. Over the past few months, my campaign team and I have worked to educate ourselves about the Census and some unique challenges we will face in 2020 (such as the first digital census). We have also attended speaking events with representatives from NYC's Census steering committee and are excited to work with partners to make sure that the most underrepresented communities in AD 52 receive the support they need to complete the Census in 2020. In terms of specific next steps:

- During my campaign, I will **work with local CBOs to reach the hard-to-count tracts** in our district, relying on data from CUNY's HTC 2020 project: <https://www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us/> and guidance from community members.
- My Field Director plans to attend a Census "201" CRE training in 2020 to **determine how my campaign can support Census efforts** during its key months (April to June), which overlap with the District Leader race.
- From a media and educational perspective, I believe the next few months are an important window for **spreading the word about Census 2020**. Distrust in government is high (and for good reason);

however, the census is anonymous, secure, and critical to a functioning democracy. I hope to lend my voice to efforts to inform community members about the Census by carrying Census materials during our canvasses and sharing educational information on social media.

- Finally, although I want to be conscious of any conflict of interest between my political efforts and government counting goals, I believe canvassers for campaigns carry the same skill sets necessary to make great Census volunteers. As we approach April 2020, I plan to **work closely with community groups to coordinate volunteers** and make sure we are throwing our door-knocking might behind Census efforts.

11) What is your position on the current land use and zoning struggles in your district?

Regarding Gowanus rezoning: After attending a CB6 meeting on Gowanus Green, it's clear we have a long way to go towards determining the best path forward. Though I'm a newcomer to this conversation, there are obvious important complexities to consider such as cleaning up a Superfund site, the potential to build 100% affordable housing, mitigating flood zone risks, and developing housing on land that was previously zoned as public land. I don't know what the exact answer is in this space, but I believe that there needs to be serious infrastructure investment by the city in order to support any increase in population density (e.g., wastewater runoff and public transit) -- and that the community needs to be included in the decision-making.

For the Gowanus Green, I believe 100% affordable housing would be a compelling proposal, but there needs to be serious work to make sure building on a designated Superfund site does not result in moving some of our more vulnerable neighbors into unsafe, polluted spaces. I also believe NYCHA needs to be included in Gowanus rezoning decisions and financial benefits should be invested in public housing in the area. Finally and most importantly, as a candidate and, if elected, as a District Leader, I will work diligently to make sure I **advocate for racial justice and environmental justice alongside the need to solve our housing crisis**. Rezoning most often benefits white and wealthy communities and racial justice analyses need to be brought to every stage of this work. Similarly, as we build to accommodate much needed affordable housing, we must also ensure a safe and clean community for all.

Regarding the BQE plans: I'm supportive of the Cobble Hill Association, Brooklyn Heights Association, and other neighborhood housing association groups who want to dramatically rethink the BQE, car culture, and its impact on our neighborhoods. We do not need a six-lane highway going through our district. With the latest reports indicating the cantilever is failing even faster than anticipated, we need a thoughtful solution to this problem -- **one that addresses environmental, public health, and other externalities** -- now. I hope the city's panel comes back with a more workable solution for our neighbors and I look forward to partnering with those housing association groups who are fighting for the best solution.

Regarding the Boerum Hill jail: I'm a **full supporter of closing Rikers**, full stop. A borough-based system is a practical interim step (while wholly imperfect) and continuing to support mass decarceration efforts across our city and state.

12) District Leaders and the Kings County Democratic Committee Executive Committee have the power to recommend commissioners and other staff hires to the Board of Elections. In what ways would you use your position as District Leader to increase transparency in the commissioner selection and hiring processes for the BOE, and professionalization of the BOE generally? What, if anything, would you do differently than your predecessor to ensure fairness and transparency in the hiring of poll workers?

If the goal is to professionalize the Board of Elections (which I support), any commissioner selection process should be conducted with as much transparency and accountability as possible. To me, that means any candidate considered for a commissioner position should have the **appropriate professional background** for leading an organization such as the Board of Elections. Moreover, County Committee members who wish

to participate should be part of the vetting and selection process. While it's the District Leaders' role to recommend BOE positions, there is no reason there can't be broader participation and buy-in across members of the Brooklyn Democratic Party through County Committee members' participation.

Though the hiring of poll workers is District Leaders' responsibility, it does not have to be a solo effort. A robust Assembly District Committee (ADC) with engaged County Committee members would be well-positioned to **share the overall responsibility** of well-staffed and functioning poll sites. There is also an opportunity to better partner with advocacy groups such as Brooklyn Voters Alliance and Let NY Vote to be on the forefront of the work to make our democracy as accessible as we can.

I'd also recommend more robust **training for all Board of Elections staff**, including commissioners. Secure elections with the necessary infrastructure requires Board of Elections staff with an aligned mission of facilitating our elections to the best of their ability. In order for Board of Elections staff and poll workers to be able to serve NYC voters to the fullest capacity, we need to invest in the professional training of all personnel on the front lines of serving NYC voters.