



Tuesday, May 11, 2021

Citizens Union 2021 Candidate Questionnaire - Borough President

Dear Candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for the office of borough president! Citizens Union appreciates your commitment to serve the public.

In the following pages, you will find questions regarding your positions on various reform issues and your plans for office. The form includes sections on functions of the borough president office, planning and capital budget, and community boards and appointments.

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for city offices, and to issue our preference for the June primary. Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

**

If you wish to be considered, please submit the questionnaire by April 17 and no later than 48 before your interview.

If you seek our support, we will also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process.

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If you cannot complete the questionnaire in one sitting, you can click Save and Continue Later at the bottom of every page.

Once you submit the questionnaire, you will receive a confirmation email with a PDF file containing your responses. Citizens Union will not be able to see your answers unless you submit the form. We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).

For any questions, please email candidates@citizensunion.org

We thank you very much for your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Your Info

Name

Ben Kallos

Seeking office:

Manhattan Borough President

In which primary

Democratic

Age

40

Education

Bronx Science, SUNY Albany, SUNY Buffalo Law School

Occupation/Employer

NYC Council

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

NYC Council Member District 5, Former Community Board 8 Member

Website

kallos.nyc

Twitter

@kallos

Facebook

@kallos

Affirmations

Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?

Yes

Have you qualified to receive matching campaign finance funds from the CFB?

Yes

Are you willing to be interviewed by Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee?

Yes

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites for Citizens Union's endorsements)

Signature



THE OFFICE OF THE BOROUGH PRESIDENT

1. The role of borough presidents often changes depending on the office holder. How would you use the office of the borough president to impact city policies affecting the borough? What is the vision of your office?

The role of the Borough President has allowed the elected to accomplish great reforms and I have an even greater vision for the Office.

Borough President Brewer and I are two of the handful of electeds who have weighed in on both Charter Revisions, one of which was initiated by the Borough President, and I am the only person running in this race who has done so. I believe it is very likely that I am the only person in this race who has read every word of the City's Charter. The Borough President is uniquely situated to change the fabric of our City, physically through land use, through constituent services, and through the Charter itself.

My vision is to activate and mobilize residents of Manhattan throughout the borough, emboldening them to stand up to the wealthy and powerful to win a City for everyday New Yorkers. Our City is at a crossroads and we must take action to ensure we can all stay and continue to work, raise our families, and enjoy the City we love.

2. The city charter was recently amended to establish an independent, minimum budget for borough presidents. If elected, how will you utilize this new protected status to better serve your borough?

I actually helped win this provision, which you can see for yourself at <https://benkallos.com/press-release/charter-revision-commission-testimony> When it comes to land use, the budget, and public policy, sometimes the Borough President has to be in a different place than the City Council. In order to ensure a system of checks and balances, each Borough President's Office must have an

independent budget. Winning this provision was extremely important to me because as Borough President, I want to be able to stand up to the Mayor, the Speaker, and the City Council without the fear of retaliation and having my budget slashed.

As I have been one of the most independent Council Members, I will also be the most independent Borough President.

3. The charter requires borough presidents to directly engage with city agencies through a borough service cabinet to coordinate service delivery and issues. Yet the nature, level, and quality of collaboration with agencies varies. How will you work with city agencies to ensure meaningful engagement?

The charter mandate for district service cabinets is a good idea on paper but it can't be divorced from the reality of our budget and the larger context of our City. I wrote the law that put the budget online and we've been able to work with community boards and district service cabinets to represent their most consistent complaints when negotiating funding for services in the budget, such as winning increased trash pickup.

Some problems are too big for district service cabinets and need a dedicated taskforce to meaningfully address the issues, which is why I lead two of them: the East River Esplanade Taskforce with Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and the East Side Taskforce for Homeless Outreach and Services (ETHOS) with Borough President Gale Brewer and Senator Liz Krueger.

With the East River Esplanade Taskforce, we have successfully won more than half a billion dollars in funding to rebuild the Esplanade that was literally falling into the water in certain areas. We've invested in low-income communities of color's future by building a resilient waterfront to protect their homes.

Take ETHOS, for example. Through this taskforce we brought together faith-based organizations, nonprofits and City agencies to build and support more services for the homeless in the neighborhood. In New York City there are more homeless children in our shelters than single men,

and together with their families they make two-thirds of our homeless. That's why together we've opened supportive housing for women and children, a new supermarket-style food pantry, and won a near-unanimous resolution with support from Community Board 8 to build a new Safe Haven, all within blocks of where I live and I couldn't be prouder. With more vacant apartments than homeless families, I've proposed renting or buying vacant apartments to end homelessness for families.

4. Do you support empowering borough presidents to require the appearance of borough commissioner of city agencies for the monthly interagency "cabinet" meetings led by the borough presidents?

Yes

5. Borough presidents can hold hearings on any matter of public interest and are charged with establishing a borough-wide complaint program to report public complaints to better service delivery by agencies. How would you use these powers and the position of the office to amplify the concerns of borough residents? What issues might you focus on to improve agency performance or draw public attention?

311 is a great resource and where most people are submitting their complaints. As a software developer, I will work with BetaNYC, embedded in the Borough President's Office, to monitor 311 and fix problems. Analyzing 311 is what led me to introduce legislation that turns down the volume on after-hours construction noise, as you might have read in the New York Times at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/19/nyregion/new-york-becomes-the-city-that-never-shuts-up.html>

Beyond 311, each Community Board receives complaints through email and I would want to build a unified CRM using free software from the NYS Senate to modernize constituent services and responses from Community Boards so I can monitor and guarantee a minimum level of service throughout the borough. Just like I did with noise and working with the Department of Environmental Protection to improve legislation, I would take on systematic problems like scaffolding that never comes down, streets that need repair, schools that

aren't getting their fair share of funding, buses that never show up, and trash cans that need emptying, just to name a few.

In closing, as a developer, I would bring a data-driven approach to fixing government and cleaning up Manhattan.

6. The borough presidents have the authority to introduce legislation yet few borough presidents in recent years have exercised this authority. Would you utilize this power, and, if so, what legislation would you introduce?

Yes.

One of my major policy initiatives was stalled by the Trump administration: Automatic Benefits. As Borough President, I would push this legislation under the new Biden presidency. More than a half-million New Yorkers would have improved access to government benefits with "automatic benefits," which would be provided automatically and renewed based on information the government already has from applications and forms to increase efficiency and reduce bureaucracy. Among the proposed reforms is a requirement that whenever a city agency receives an application for one benefit, the agency must work with the person to determine eligibility for additional benefits.

As a Council Member I introduced over 100 bills and as Borough President I would work with the new City Council to pass anything I haven't passed.

I worked with Borough President Gale Brewer on a number of pieces of legislation, including Local Law 64 that requires developers receiving tax credits to put hundreds of thousands of affordable housing units back on the market, as well as the law that puts 16-year-olds on the Community Board. If I can't pass the legislation before I am term-limited out of the Council, I will buy every student a laptop to bridge the digital divide and homework gap, and I will still get the legislation done.

I will also work on legislation for universal youth jobs, universal afterschool and universal childcare. See more at kallos.nyc/ideas

PLANNING AND CAPITAL BUDGET

7. Developers argue ULURP should be streamlined while community groups and advocates believe more opportunities for input should be provided or that voting thresholds should be changed for application approval. The pandemic has cast further disruption to the process. What reforms to ULURP do you support?

Our land use process is broken. Developers push projects through and communities are forced to either swallow a poison pill or kill a project because of what it would do to their neighborhood, rather than having a real opportunity to weigh in and improve the initial proposal or dictate the terms from the start. I believe the structure of our government matters deeply and the land use process is determined by these underlying structures. That's why I testified at every level of the recent Charter Revisions, both in 2018 and 2019. The propositions I supported to implement term limits for Community Boards and amplify their voice in the process both passed. As a result, Community Boards will be more representative, better resourced, and notified of ULURP applications earlier in the process, which is a step forward, but it does not go far enough.

To truly change the ULURP process, we need to pass Introduction 0250, which I co-prime sponsored with author Council Member Reynoso. This bill requires the Department of City Planning to forward copies of completed Pre-Application Statements to each affected Borough President, Community Board, and Council Member. I also co-sponsored Introduction 1572, led by Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, which would require all environmental impact statements (EIS) to include an analysis of racial and ethnic impacts and whether the proposed action would affirmatively further fair housing within the Fair Housing Act.

Community Boards must also be more representative with members appointed who not only reflect the rich diversity of their communities but who also have the courage to stand up for themselves, their neighbors, and co-workers. That's why I've worked with the Central Labor Council to

appoint rank and file members of labor unions from teachers to the building trades with a mandate to stand up to projects that don't take care of their workers or would harm our community. As a Council Member I have stood up to our city's largest institutions from the Real Estate Board of New York to New York Presbyterian Hospital, and even Columbia University. As the next Borough President, I would recruit and appoint members to stand up to powerful institutions and fight for justice in their communities.

Finally, I believe the Borough President, as well as the Community Board, should get a binding vote in the ULURP process, as I have testified and will continue to fight for.

With these changes, the Borough President and our communities can stand taller together and build more hospitals, affordable housing, and homeless services.

8. The borough presidents make recommendations to the mayor on capital projects as part of the budget process. All of the boroughs combined additionally receive 5 percent of the appropriations in the mayor's capital budget divided between the boroughs based on formulas related to land size and population. What would be your priorities for capital projects in the borough?

As the author of the law to put the budget online, while most electeds fight over how much member item money they can bring to their district through discretionary funds, I've always negotiated with the Mayor's Office directly, including on projects that cost hundreds of millions or billions of dollars. As Co-Chair of the East River Esplanade Taskforce with Congresswoman Maloney, I have negotiated over \$500 million in funds from the Mayor's Office to benefit low-income communities of color who need a resilient waterfront infrastructure to protect their communities.

I fought for and won Universal Pre-K on the Upper East Side, and Universal 3-K for all of Manhattan and the City at a cost of several hundred million dollars. I've secured \$90 million for nonprofits serving the community and when schools were getting overcrowded on the Upper East Side and the City refused to build new schools, I wrote the law to

create transparency on how they make decisions for new school seats and I won the funding for new seats.

As Chair of the Contract Committee, I found \$15 billion in fat to trim from the budget that we could reallocate to services for seniors, youth, homeless, and those who need them most. See at: (<https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/ny-ben-kallos-nyc-budget-20200616-pj7mzlz3dfhbrp3wuhbmoafvha-story.html>).

As the next Borough President, I will continue to weigh in on our larger City Budget. As for the capital that is allocated directly by the Borough President, I would continue to invest in public schools and buy every student a laptop, and in NYCHA to ensure every building has layered access, cameras and lighting, parks that are adequately invested in, and services to help those who need it most like youth, seniors, and homeless.

9. If elected, would you post on your website all applications received by your office for capital and expense discretionary funds, as well as groups which ultimately received funding?

Yes

COMMUNITY BOARDS AND APPOINTMENTS

10. Borough presidents are charged with establishing a planning office that, among other functions, provides training and technical assistance to community boards on land use issues. The recently formed Civic Engagement Commission is also tasked with providing professional assistance to community boards, in consultation and coordination with borough presidents. Using the planning resources available, how would you use the office to help community boards fulfill their charter mandated responsibilities to provide feedback on land use proposals, while enabling the boards to make decisions independent of the borough president's office?

As Chair of the Governmental Operations Committee, I authored legislation for every

Community Board to have a dedicated urban planner and I advocated for this as part of the Charter Revision Commission. I have been disappointed to see urban planners not hired for Community Boards. I've used my funding to hire urban planners for the 3 boards I represent and I've provided funding for urban planning services to every board in Manhattan. If urban planners are not funded, I will stand up to the Commission and make sure they are so we can plan for a better City.

11. Borough presidents are charged with making hundreds of appointments. What criteria would you use for appointments to positions appointed by the borough president (the Panel on Educational Policy, City Planning Commission, community boards, etc.)? What processes would you put in place for advertising open positions and recruiting qualified candidates that represent the diversity of New York City, and how would you assure that appointments represent the diversity of the borough's neighborhoods?

I got my start on Community Board 8 Manhattan. I think I've proven that when elected officials support their community boards we can be unstoppable.

As Chair of the Governmental Operations Committee, I authored an 80-page report, detailing how we can improve community boards, recruitment, and diversity. You can see more at <https://benkallos.com/cb>. I will expand where we look for applicants by advertising in newspapers from the New York Times to local neighborhood blogs like Patch, reaching out to cultural mediums, and leaving no stone unturned from TV and radio to even TikTok.

In my local boards, I have been proud to increase the diversity of membership with Gale Brewer's partnership, introducing and passing a resolution that allowed teens on community boards. The Board where I have the most appointments has seen high turnover because I've been willing to take people off who stopped participating or showing up. We are actively recruiting and appointing new members from high school students to union members and retirees, and ensuring people of color have better representation. The boards in my district have a new face and now they're fighting for

affordable housing, good union jobs, and safe streets for cyclists and pedestrians.

Boards, panels and other appointed groups can be stagnant and over time become less representative of their communities, and I will work to make ours representative of our City by appointing qualified candidates of any race, socio-economic status, gender, age, religion and more. I would advertise via my newsletter, social media, public events and with the help of local Council Members. I would also tap into the groups that know the issues best like parents, unions, neighborhood associations and more.

12. Do you support granting the borough presidents the ability to make an additional appointment to the Board of Standards and Appeals, who would only vote on matters affecting that borough?

Yes

13. Do you support establishing independent budgeting for community boards?

Yes

MISCELLANEOUS

14. What experience have you had, if any, with good government and reform issues? (e.g. voting and elections, campaign finance, ethics, police accountability, government transparency and oversight). If you've worked to advance these goals, we'd love to hear about it.

Campaign finance & elections reform:

In 2010, I helped found and lead the New Roosevelt Initiative, the first PAC devoted to government reform. We ran the campaign to oust the corrupt Senator Pedro Espada, take back the Senate and I have stood with Citizens Union fighting for campaign finance reform, redistricting reform, and to elect new officials through competitive elections.

I authored the legislation that created the new campaign finance system that makes it possible for everyday New Yorkers to run for office without the influence of real estate. Candidates can now

receive 8-to-1 public matching funds, magnifying the influence of small dollars and making it possible to run a campaign funded fully by small money.

I have been working tirelessly to make voting more accessible. In 2017, I wrote a law to ensure that New York City would offer online voter registration but a corrupt city Board of Elections and Albany legislature have refused to implement it and even blocked it over the past four years. As the next Manhattan Borough President, I will continue to fight corruption at the Board of Elections and in Albany to make it easier for people to register and vote. I will also expand early voting, proposing legislation that would mandate more poll sites that would be open for longer. Lastly, I have proposed that any candidate who qualifies for public funds should automatically be on the ballot so that voters don't have to jump through hoops and hurdles to choose candidates.

Anti-Corruption in Government:

When Citizens Union asked elected officials not to take outside income or lulus, I took the pledge. Then I refused \$64,000 in lulus and have never taken outside income. I went on to write the laws that made lulus illegal and banned outside income. The New York Times editorialized in support, calling on Albany to do the same and sadly, they did not. Give the opposition I faced, I can tell you, it wouldn't have happened without me.

I'm fighting to implement a lifetime ban on lobbying for elected officials so that the people of the city will be well-represented and so that the same rich and well-connected officials aren't always in power. Before I was even an elected official, I put elected officials' voting records online so their constituents could see how they were really voting.

As Governmental Operations Chair, I was a thorn in the side of the County Chair and the Board of Elections as I blocked appointing lobbyists and went after the corrupt culture of nepotism and dysfunction to the point that they removed me as Governmental Operations Chair. I couldn't be prouder to have fought so hard for reform that they had to remove me and would do so again. We need more elected officials who will put doing the right thing ahead of their own careers.

Correction Reform:

From closing Rikers to criminalizing the chokehold

used to murder Eric Garner to joining the lawsuit to support the repeal of 50A, no one in this race has done more for criminal justice reform. Only two elected officials have subpoenaed the NYPD: Mark Green, who I worked for, and me as Contracts Chair to force the City to share the contract for the military robots used to patrol NYCHA. In response, the Mayor cancelled the contract and got these military robots out of public housing.

15. What are the top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected? Feel free to reference an answer above rather than restate it.

First: Require affordable housing as part of every new development

Second: Desegregate public schools and give every student a laptop to finally bridge the digital divide

Third: Win a lifetime ban on lobbying for elected officials

16. If you have not addressed this already, in what major ways would your priorities as borough president differ from the incumbent?

Gale Brewer and I agree on a lot and have worked together on a lot of legislation, including eliminating the loophole around voids in zoning.

We disagreed on term limits for Community Boards and voters overwhelmingly supported my plan to institute term limits. I'll be working over the next 8 years to ensure the transfer of knowledge and to be ready for term limits to start.

With the new Council coming in, I am concerned that many of the reforms we won, such as matching funds and eliminating outside income and lulus, will be reversed. That's why as Borough President I would fight to protect them.

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

I am co-chair of the Progressive Caucus, and I am running for Manhattan Borough President because anywhere else in America, people struggle to get out, but here in New York City people struggle to stay, and together I believe we can fix that.

I grew up right here in Manhattan. I graduated from the Bronx High School of Science and our State University system.

Living with a single mom, sharing a room with her,

living with my grandparents, I was on free and reduced school lunch, and I was so ashamed for other kids to know I was poor that I didn't eat. That's why I fought to make school lunch free and want to feed every child dinner as part of universal afterschool. As a new parent, I know we can make it easier to raise a family by providing Universal Child Care.

As a tenant in a market rate one-bedroom apartment with my wife, daughter, and pandora (and yes that's her in the background) we had a landlord spike our rent and force us out during a difficult high risk pregnancy, and I can tell you first hand that even with thousands of vacant apartments, Manhattan still has an affordable housing crisis.

Developers get billions in tax breaks, corrupt politicians get thousands in campaign contributions, and tenants like us pay for it all. That's why, when I ran for City Council, I refused big money from real estate developers, corporations, and lobbyists, then I wrote the law so more progressive candidates could run the right way and win!

When thousands of people took to the streets to demand that the City Council hold the NYPD accountable, I listened, and I am the only one in this race who voted to defund the police.

Together we can elect a new City Council and Borough President who haven't been corrupted by real estate and corporate money.

We can prioritize a worker-led recovery.

We can win a city for all of us.

Please feel free to attach any additional information such as resume, campaign brochures, or issues statements.

Please review your answers by clicking PREVIEW ANSWERS below. You can submit the questionnaire at the bottom of the preview page by clicking SUBMIT.

Once you click SUBMIT, you will receive a confirmation email with a PDF file containing your responses. If you don't see the email, please check your spam box.

If you have any further questions, you may contact us at candidates@citizensunion.org.