



The Rent Is Due: A Toolkit for Queer Mutual Aid & Living Preservation

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What Is the Rent Is Due Program?

Rent Is Due is a guidebook created for the Rent Is Due Program Toolkit, a project designed to support the revival and reimagining of NYC's historic rent parties as tools for community care, housing solidarity, and creative cultural expression.

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"We believe that understanding how systems shape daily life—and how communities can reshape those systems—is the first step to stronger, more equitable participation."

About the Rent Is Due Toolkit

The Rent Is Due Toolkit is a set of portable, interactive workshop tools designed to help neighbors, artists, organizers, and housing advocates communicate and collaborate.

Each tool translates cultural history, economic realities, and organizing strategies into hands-on activities and intuitive visuals that help people learn by looking, doing, and talking together. This toolkit draws from the deep legacy of rent parties, events that once helped Black New Yorkers pay the rent while also creating vital spaces for music, safety, and joy. Today, the Rent Is Due Program adapts these traditions to address modern housing pressures and strengthen community networks.

Toolkit components were developed in consultation with cultural historians, housing organizers, tenants' rights groups, and community partners across NYC. They were tested extensively with local organizations and will be distributed citywide for use in workshops, mutual aid efforts, cultural programs, and community organizing.

Other resources related to the series include:

What Is Affordable Housing? — NYC Edition

What Is Affordable Housing? — Chicago Edition

What Is Zoning? — NYC Edition

What Is ULURP?

In Collaboration with:

NYC Cultural Affairs

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Place Memory & Culture Incubator



CONTENTS

1 WHAT IS RENT IS DUE?

2 WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

3 PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

4 HOW TO GET INVOLVED?

5 RESOURCES

WHAT IS RENT IS DUE?

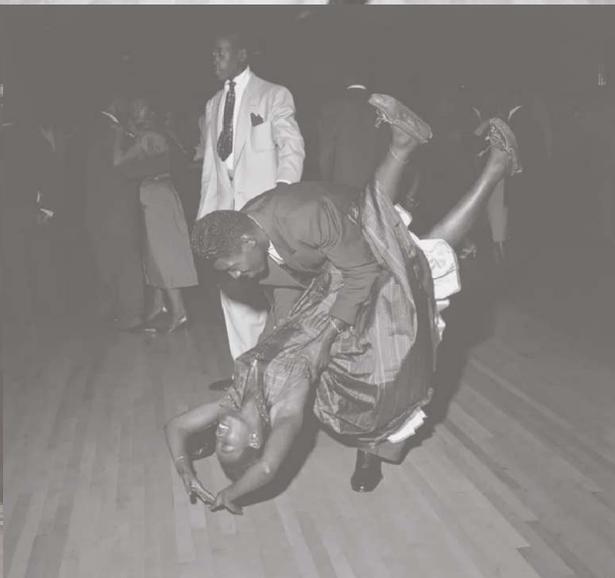
PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

Mission Statement

The Rent Is Due redefines preservation as a collective, sensorial, and economic practice. One that uses the tools, energy, and community imagination of the Harlem Renaissance to resist displacement today.

Core Principles

- **Radical Preservation:** Preservation not as nostalgia, but as a living act of joy, resistance, and mutual support.
- **Embodied Culture:** Culture is not frozen in time; it is carried by people, spaces, and atmosphere.
- **Community Survival:** Rent parties historically supported Black and queer residents; today they continue to do so through mutual aid, performance, and shared care.
- **Movable Cultural Infrastructure:** A recurring event model that travels across Harlem, keeping memory and community practice alive even when physical spaces disappear.



INSTITUTIONAL VS. INFORMAL TOOL

This toolkit operates in two parallel registers.

The first is institutional: a research-driven guide that translates an informal cultural practice into a legible preservation framework for partners, funders, and organizers.

The second is informal: lightweight, low-tech materials designed to circulate through community networks without institutional mediation.

The tension between these two modes is intentional. Rent parties have always existed between visibility and opacity, survival and celebration, formality and refusal.

BACKGROUND + CONTEXT

Harlem's Rent Party Legacy

During the Harlem Renaissance, rent parties were acts of creative survival, private homes transformed into collective spaces of joy, resistance, and economic support for Black and queer residents.

Harlem faces rapid gentrification and cultural erasure. The spaces that held Black and queer culture are disappearing even as their legacy is celebrated. The Rent Is Due positions rent parties as a modern, community-centered preservation tool that protects the people who sustain Harlem's culture.

Guiding Questions

What does it mean to preserve Black and Queer history when the spaces are gone?

What forms of preservation support the people rather than just the buildings?

How can sound, intimacy, and shared atmosphere carry memory forward?



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

HISTORICAL RESEARCH:

The Clam House was a popular Harlem nightclub during the Prohibition era. It became a lively gathering place for LGBTQ+ patrons, artists, and nightlife seekers during the Harlem Renaissance. With its bold performances and inclusive atmosphere, the Clam House played an important role in shaping Harlem's cultural and social history. The club was demolished and is replaced with a new residential building.

The Harlem Renaissance Ballroom and Casino was a vibrant cultural hub in Harlem, hosting dances, performances, and community events during the early 20th century. Opened in 1924, it became a key gathering place for Black artists, athletes, and social clubs during the Harlem Renaissance. Though the original building was demolished in 2015, its legacy lives on as a symbol of Black cultural achievement and community life.

THE CLAM HOUSE



HARLEM RENAISSANCE BALLROOM

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

No Two Rent Parties Look the Same

These tools are meant to adapt, bend, and disappear when needed. Hosts decide what applies. Some events will be quiet. Some will be loud. Some will be undocumented. All are valid.

Documentation: Gathering Resources

Goal: Build a sensory archive that bridges Harlem's past and present. Soundscape of archival Harlem music, poems, and performances in entry spaces. Gradual transition into contemporary queer Harlem sound, movement, and noise. Visual projections, ephemera, or archival media from Harlem's cultural history. Atmospheric elements (texture, scent, lighting) to create immersive memory. Collect participant reflections, oral histories, and ambient recordings

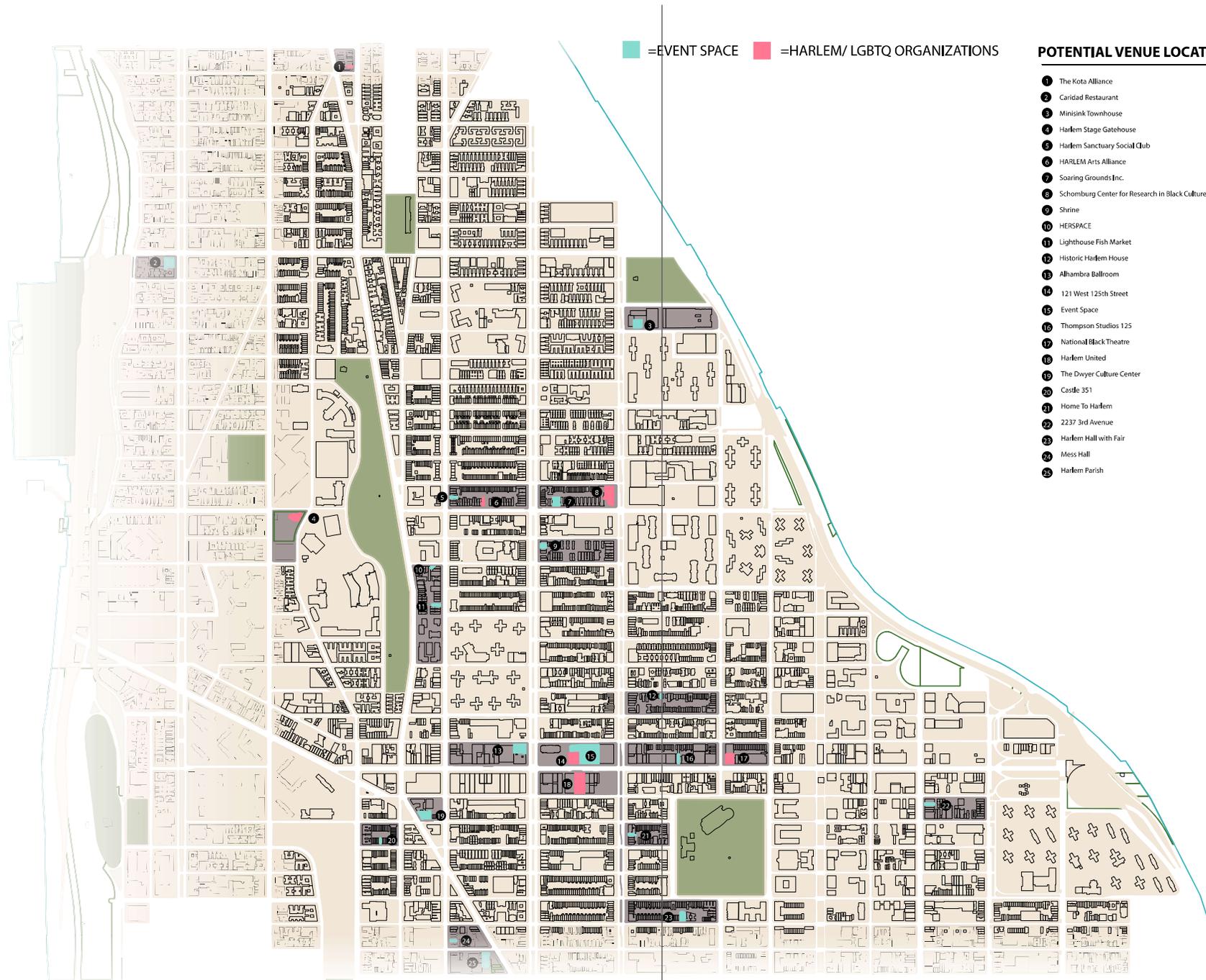
PROGRAM FRAMEWORK:



DESIGN + PRESERVATION- FINDING AND ACTIVATING SPACES

Use domestic and small community spaces as civic infrastructure that protects Black and queer life.

Each month a different host opens their home, studio, or small venue. DJs curate sound rooted in Black queer joy and performers build a living archive through movement, storytelling, drag, and music. Entry fees and donations directly support hosts' housing costs and community preservation initiatives. Event Design Elements consist of food (communal tables, shared dishes, Harlem-specific ingredients), art + decor referencing Harlem's cultural lineage, dance as a preservation language, storytelling, open mic, or oral history and rent cards announcing future events.



■ =EVENT SPACE ■ =HARLEM/ LGBTQ ORGANIZATIONS

POTENTIAL VENUE LOCATIONS FOR: RENT IS DUE

- 1 The Kota Alliance
- 2 Caridad Restaurant
- 3 Minisink Townhouse
- 4 Harlem Stage Gatehouse
- 5 Harlem Sanctuary Social Club
- 6 HARLEM Arts Alliance
- 7 Soaring Grounds Inc.
- 8 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
- 9 Shrine
- 10 HERSPACE
- 11 Lighthouse Fish Market
- 12 Historic Harlem House
- 13 Alhambra Ballroom
- 14 121 West 125th Street
- 15 Event Space
- 16 Thompson Studios 125
- 17 National Black Theatre
- 18 Harlem United
- 19 The Dwyer Culture Center
- 20 Castle 351
- 21 Home To Harlem
- 22 2237 3rd Avenue
- 23 Harlem Hall with Fair
- 24 Mess Hall
- 25 Harlem Parish

Host Notes (Not Rules)

Things learned from past rent parties

This is not a permit or a policy. These are shared notes passed between hosts to support care, safety, and sustainability - without fixing the party into a single form.

- Host agreement form
- Floor plan / capacity notes
- Safety plan (accessibility, exits, allies identified)
- Atmosphere setup (lighting, scent, seating, décor)
- DJ/audio setup
- Food / drink plan
- Performance schedule
- Entry fee / donation structure
- On-site funds distribution plan



PRESENTATION+ PUBLICATION- EXPERIENCING MEMORY

Goal: Construct a journey from memorial to present practice.

Visitors move through:

- Transitional Entry Space
- Archival sound is the first memorial act
- Guests are grounded in lineage before entering the party
- Contemporary Practice Space
- Live performances, dance, and sound
- A space where preservation is actively happening, not remembered
- Atmospheric Documentation
- Focus on mood, light, sound, texture
- Capture the “feeling” of preservation rather than static images
- Rent Cards & Community Publication
- Printed cards with event info, future dates, and ways to support
- A small, recurring artifact that builds the Rent Is Due network

Publication Deliverables:

- **Event recap zine / newsletter**
- **Sound recording or playlist**
- **Photo essay (consent-based)**
- **Rent cards design file**
- **Social media + community distribution plan**



Rent Is Due Toolkit

MUTUAL AID & ECONOMIC MODEL

Rent parties historically paid the rent and today they still can. They can include entry fees directly support host's housing or preservation costs, optional tiered ticketing, partnerships with Harlem-based artists and vendors, monthly reporting for transparency, emergency fund contributions for Black and Queer Harlem residents

Financial Tools:

- Budget template
- Host payment structure
- Donation tracking sheet
- Mutual aid fund guidelines
- Transparency report format

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & SAFETY

We must prioritize Black and queer safety, privacy, and have controlled visibility. Choose spaces intentionally and maintain boundaries around documentation and press. To build a culture of consent: photography, recording, touch, etc.

- Community guidelines
- Consent signage
- Photography policy
- Onsite safety/support team roles
- Accessibility checklist

TOOLKIT ADDITIONS

A. Sample Event Timeline

- Pre-event planning (2–4 weeks out)
- Host meeting
- DJ/performer lineup
- Documentation plan
- Setup / event flow
- Breakdown / wrap-up
- Post-event publication + reporting

B. Sample Communication Templates

- Host outreach email
- Performer invitation
- Community safety guidelines
- Rent card design templates

C. Visual Style Guide (Optional)

- Typography, color palette, image references, logo placement

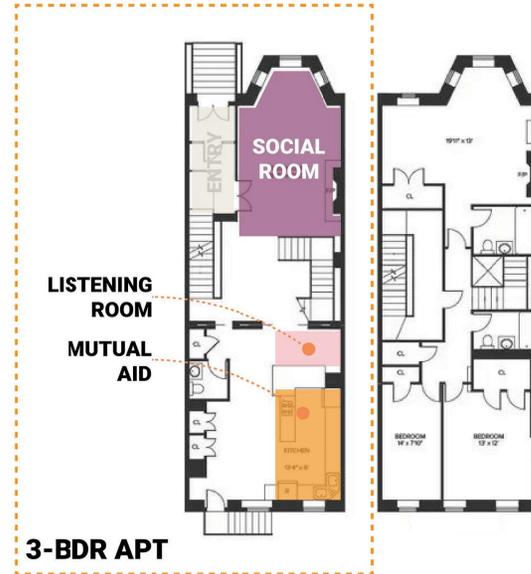
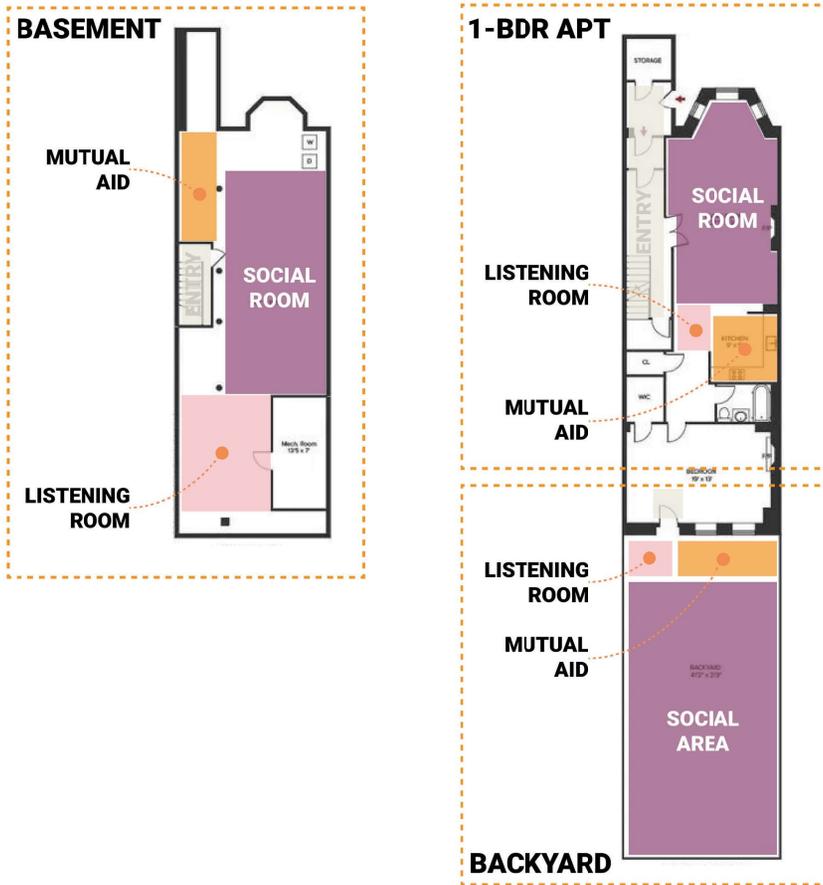
LONG-TERM VISION

Create a network of Harlem hosts and participating venues

Establish a sustained preservation fund for Black and queer residents

Produce an annual publication or

EXAMPLE 1: BROWNSTONE VERSION: BASEMENT, BACKYARD, APARTMENTS



- Small-scale
- Domestic
- Controlled audience
- Listening room
- Mutual aid kitchen
- Atmosphere as preservation

This emphasizes opacity and intimacy



Rent Is Due Toolkit



HOW TO GET INVOLVED

EXAMPLE 2: COMMUNITY PARTNER COLLABORATION



Collective+realistic

- Yoruba cultural center
- Harlem stage
- Multipurpose room, small stage

This proves real-world feasibility

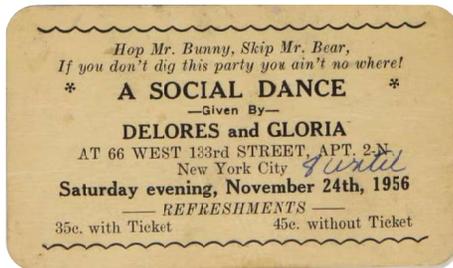


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HOW TO GET INVOLVED

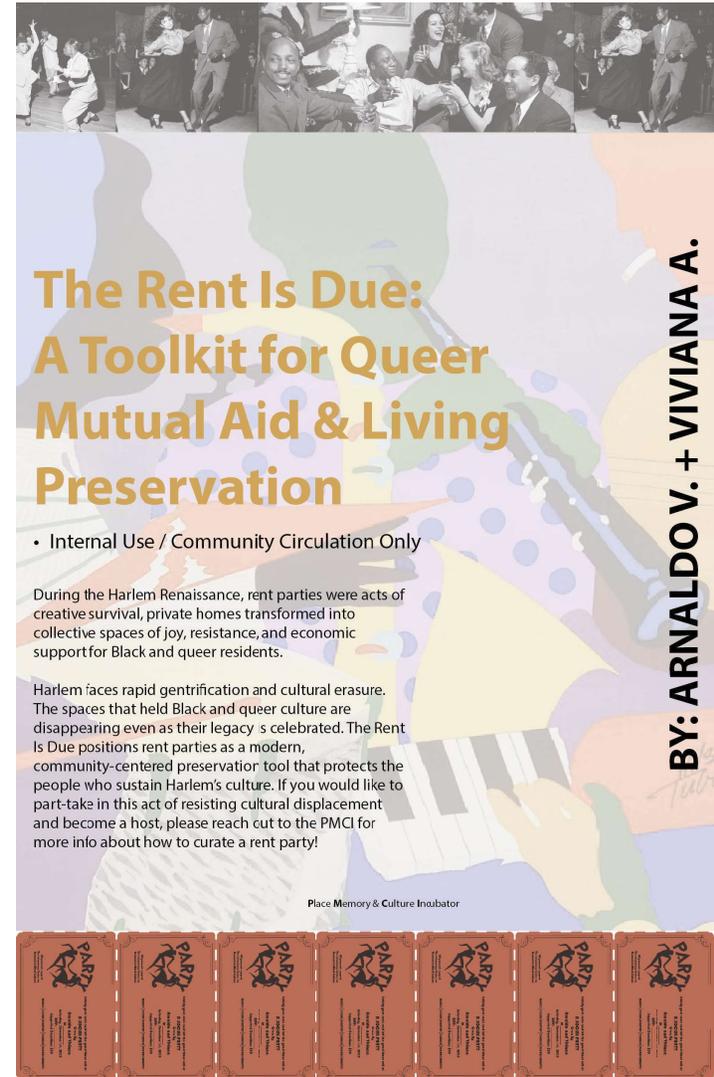
INVITATION SAMPLE



Designed to circulate without explanation.
No logos. No institutions.
Just enough information to find the gathering.

Rent Is Due Toolkit

TEAR-OFF FLYER / HAND-TO-HAND INVITATION



Place Memory & Culture Incubator

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

MORE RESOURCES:

POTENTIAL COLLABORATIONS:

- Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
- SAGE Harlem (Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders)
- Harlem SGL•LGBTQ Center
- Harlem United
- Harlem Arts Alliance (HAA)
- West Harlem Arts Alliance (WHAA)
- Kota Alliance
- Caribbean Equality Project
- Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art
- LGBTQIA+ youth at Hetrick-Martin Institute
- National Black Theatre
- Harlem Stage Gatehouse



MORE RESOURCES



MORE QUESTIONS?

REACH OUT TO: PLACE, MEMORY, CULTURAL INCUBATOR PROGRAM

