



[Home](#) › [News and Events](#) › [News](#)

# Newest Americans Story Bus Collects Youth Feedback for Newark 360 Master Plan

By Lawrence Lerner

Nov 9, 2022

Rutgers University–Newark’s Newest Americans project has been documenting the lives of Newark’s diverse immigrant population since its founding in 2014, producing gallery and museum exhibits, interactive experiences, and educational curriculum, along with multimedia stories and short documentary films that have appeared in outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic* and BBC Radio and have attracted national attention while racking up prestigious awards along the way.

Two summers ago, the group launched the Newest Americans Story Bus, an Econoline Van–turned–mobile audio-recording and photography studio that fans out into various parts of Newark to meet residents where they live and gather, expanding the initiative’s outreach efforts and helping it to collect more stories from an even more diverse group of denizens.

When it debuted in summer 2021, the Story Bus caught the attention not only of residents but also city officials and representatives from Bloomberg Associates, the philanthropic consulting arm of

Bloomberg Philanthropies, who asked Newest Americans staff to lend their oral-history expertise to help collect residents' stories and feedback for Newark 360, an effort to develop a comprehensive 10-year plan for the city.

The City of Newark's Office of Planning & Zoning and Bloomberg recently released the finished plan, the result of a yearlong process whereby city officials and their partners, including Story Bus staff, spoke with residents from all neighborhoods and walks of life to ensure that the plan includes their perspectives and reflects their needs.

"We were thrilled to be asked to participate in a democratic process and civic ritual that will determine the city's goals and priorities for the next decade," said Professor Timothy Raphael, founder and co-director of Newest Americans. "We passionately believe that the stories people tell about the city they live in and the one they want to live in capture attitudes and aspirations that more data-driven, quantitative approaches do not."

The Story Bus team was asked to focus on Newark's young people, age 8 to 30, formulating a set of questions with Bloomberg about their feelings for Newark in general, and about their neighborhood and housing infrastructure, transportation habits and options, recreational leanings and opinions on the city's cultural offerings, whether they plan on staying in Newark, and where they'd like to see the city in 10 years.

---

“We were thrilled to be asked to participate in a democratic process and civic ritual that will determine the city's goals and priorities for the next decade.”

---

Story Bus partnered with organizers of various summer 2022 events to identify young people who wanted to share their vision of and for Newark. Events included two NJPAC Sounds of the City concerts, the Newark Juneteenth Block Party, Newark's National Night Out, and a celebration of Nat Turner Park.

"The city and Bloomberg were looking for ways to reach Newarkers whose voices had not typically been included in previous planning processes," said Raphael. "They thought, and we agreed, that the Story Bus would be able to get to places and interview people that their other efforts were not reaching, and ultimately asked us to interview young people in the city."

The Story Bus generates a lot of buzz when it shows up at events, in part because of the striking visual treatment of the bus by local artists Gera and Werk. Event organizers

and the young people interviewed were generally excited to be part of the Newark 360 planning process and appreciative that somebody was interested in hearing what they had to say, said Raphael.

Raphael has been especially happy to put the Story Bus to such good use.

"When we launched the Story Bus last year, we envisioned many different possibilities," said Raphael. "This was not one of them, so it was particularly exciting for us to expand our understanding of the way the Story Bus can be productively deployed."

*The Newark 360 Master Plan, which will guide the city's growth over the next 10 years, looks at a number of key areas, including economic development, historic preservation and cultural assets, housing, parks and open space, sustainable development, transportation and circulation, Utilities and urban design, and utilities and critical infrastructure. View the plan [here](#).*

Department

Arts, Culture & Media

Faculty

## Related News

All News

SASN Welcomes New Faculty  
for Fall 2023 (Pt.4)

Oct 11, 2023

RU-N Student Films Screened at  
Eighth-Annual Newark  
International Film Festival

Sep 21, 2023

Legendary Sportswriter Jerry  
Izenberg Pens Memoir About  
Growing Up in Newark

Sep 6, 2023

# Get Started

Be a part of our 250-year history of excellence.

Apply

Contact Us

Visit Us