

# Vibes and Vision: How Common Ground Will Transform the CCNY's Experience



**Figure 1.** The City College of New York

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***Common Ground Force***

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## Introduction

CCNY has brought together the best of campus life—discover new food, friends, and resources at your new student center. Yet despite its rich academic and cultural environment, The City College of New York (CCNY) lacks a centralized space that meets the academic, social, and wellness needs of its diverse student body. Students move between crowded lounges and disconnected study areas that do not support teamwork or belonging. This proposal advocates for the creation of Common Grounds, a sustainable and wellness-oriented student center designed to integrate technology, comfort, and inclusivity—fostering collaboration, community engagement, and academic success.

To ensure the new student center meets the needs of the campus community, a survey was conducted to identify students' priorities for space, facilities, resources, atmosphere, and overall usability. The results, visualized in the pie chart below, revealed a strong demand for improved Wi-Fi connectivity, collaborative and relaxing study areas, and access to wellness resources. These findings underscore that CCNY students value a balance between productivity and well-being in a shared campus environment (See Appendix for complete survey data, Fig 2).



university's commitment to a green future (See Appendix, Figure 4 and Figure 5, for complete sustainability survey data).

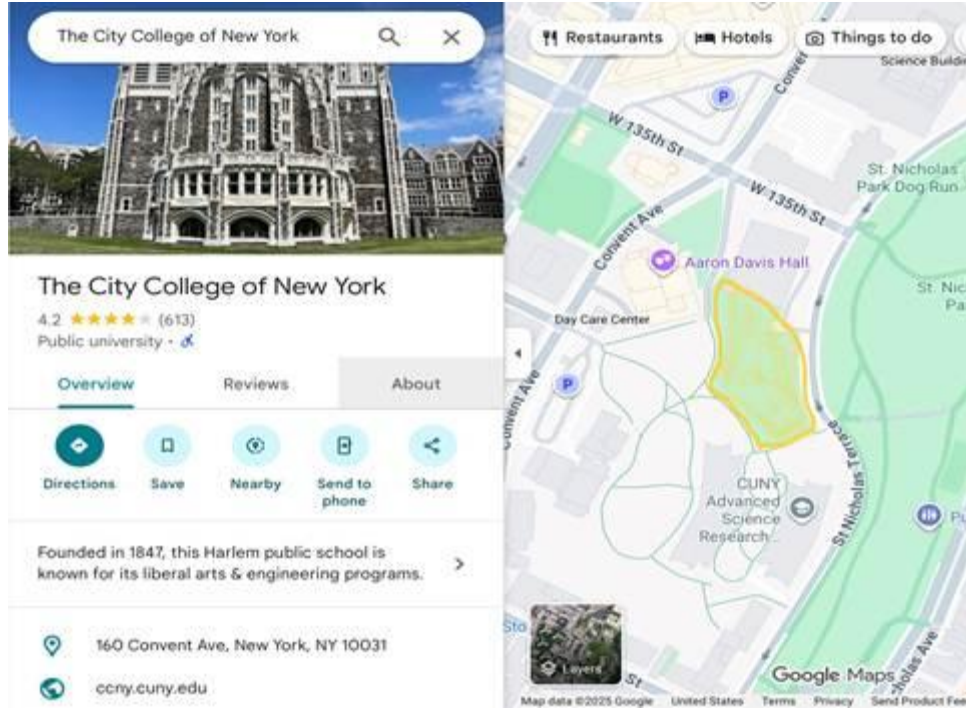
Further supporting this need, the 2024 CUNY Student Experience Survey reported that only 59% of students across community colleges were satisfied with their social experience and just 67% felt a sense of belonging at their institution. Additionally, 59% of students indicated spending no time taking part in campus activities (City University of New York Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, 2025). These results highlight a broader trend across CUNY—students lack an adequate space to build connections and engage outside the classroom.

Together, both data sources point to the same conclusion: CCNY students need a central hub that strengthens social ties, supports mental health, and enhances academic engagement. *Common Grounds* will answer that need by transforming campus life into an inclusive, connected, and student-centered experience.

## Action Plan

Inspired by Herman, Thompson, and Violich (n.d.), the CCNY “Common Grounds” Student Center is envisioned as a connective hub that promotes belonging and collaboration across campus life. This action plan outlines how the center will integrate academic, social, and wellness functions in a modern, inclusive space.

### Proposed facility location



**Figure 6.** CCNY's Campus obtained by Google Maps

**Site:** CCNY campus, 160 Convent Ave, New York, NY 10031.

**Coordinates:** Latitude/Longitude: 40.816853, -73.950589)

**Footprint (approx. area):** 935 sq ft per level

**Levels proposed:** Basement + 4 stories = 5 levels

**Approx. Area:** 935 sq ft x 5 levels = 4,675 sq ft total approximate gross area

Research on student centers shows that accommodating an ever-changing student body requires adaptable services and flexible design features. The survey conducted for this proposal accurately represents the diverse student body at CCNY, including commuters, non-traditional students, and seniors. This contributes to the student-centered goal of creating a space that

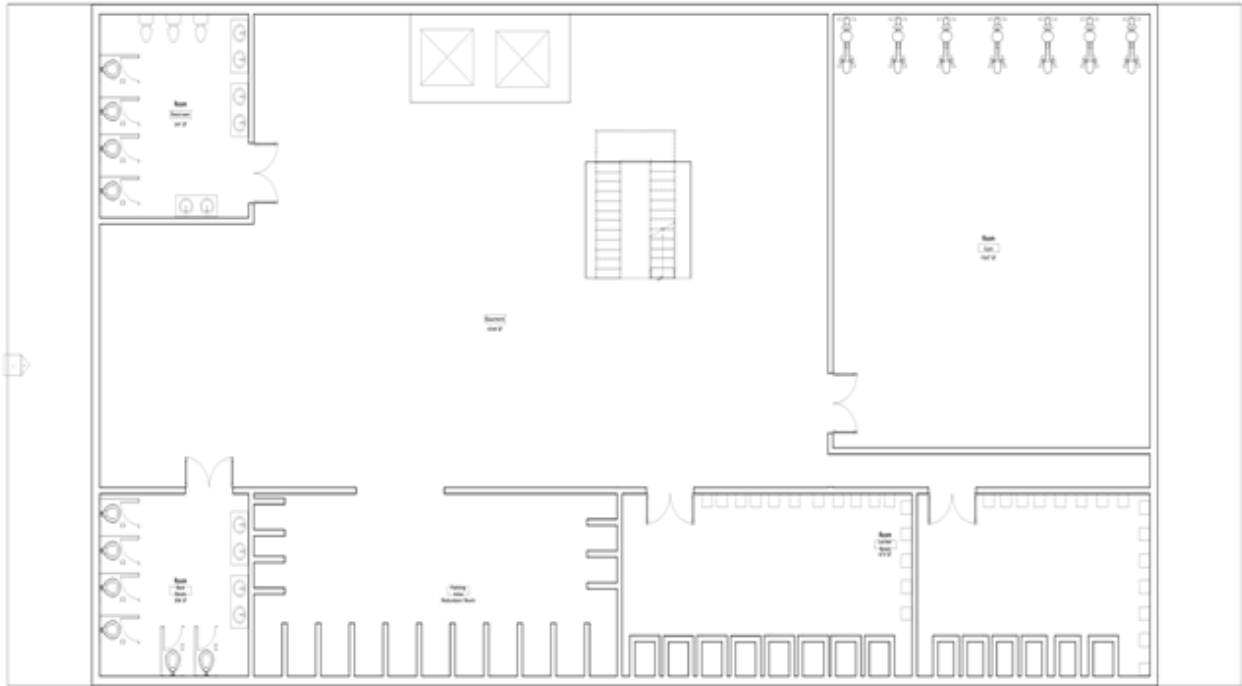
supports collaboration, encourages healthy academics and personal growth, and provides adaptable essentials to meet future academic and social needs.

In addition, research by Nalongo (2024) shows that thoughtful school design directly influences student engagement, emotional wellness, and learning outcomes. This finding supports the idea that Common Grounds will incorporate natural light, comfortable spaces, and open circulation areas to enhance both mental and academic performance.

The building's design offers a welcoming approach that connects students to one another, to campus services, and to the broader campus community. The center will make it easier for students to study, eat, relax, and access counseling and tutoring services. This concept aligns with the understanding that a student center acts as a connective hub within the campus ecosystem.

The proposed four-story structure with a basement—centrally located on the CCNY campus—will serve as a flexible hub for study, collaboration, recreation, and wellness (See Appendix for 3D Building Structural, Figure 7). Each level is designed with student input and sized for adaptability within approximately 935 sq ft per floor. Programmed elements can be arranged vertically and through multi-use furniture, consistent with evidence that flexible spaces foster creativity and engagement (Nalongo, 2024).

The diagram below shows the basement layout, featuring the gym, event space, and secure storage areas.

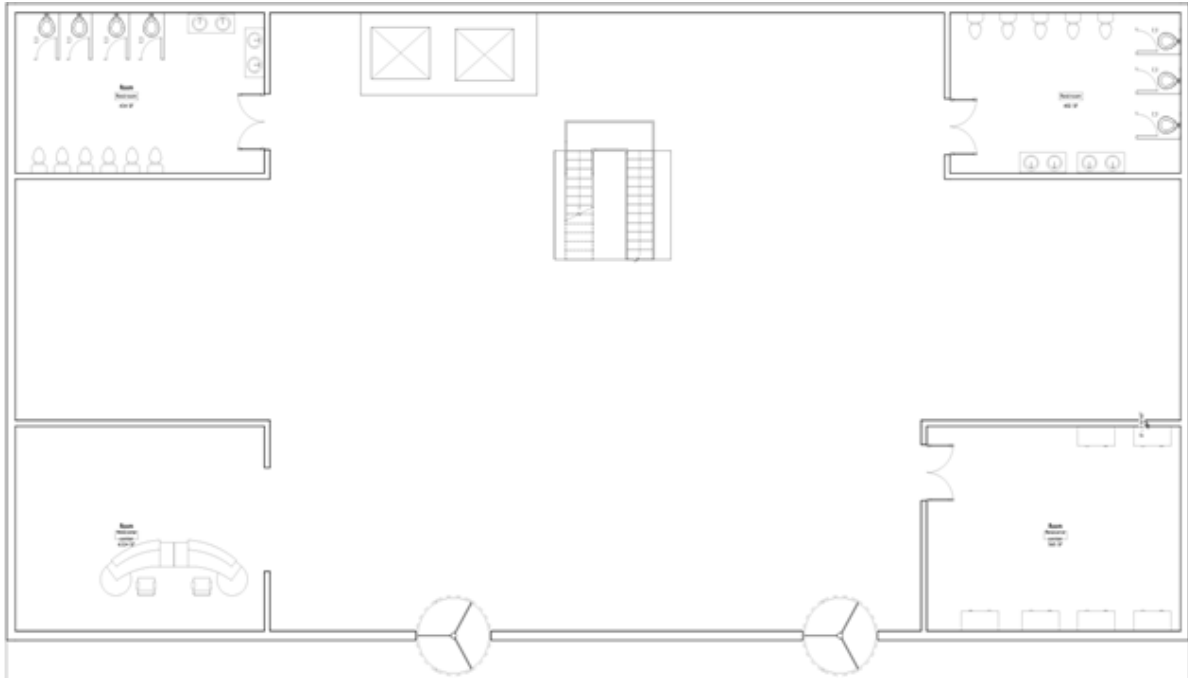


**Figure 8.** Basement floor plan of the Common Grounds Student Center.

**Basement (Gym/Event Space, Secure Storage & Lockers, Utility):**

Gym, event space, secure student storage, bike racks, building mechanicals, staff storage, and small changing/shower rooms for athletes or commuters.

*The layout below illustrates the design and key features of the first floor.*

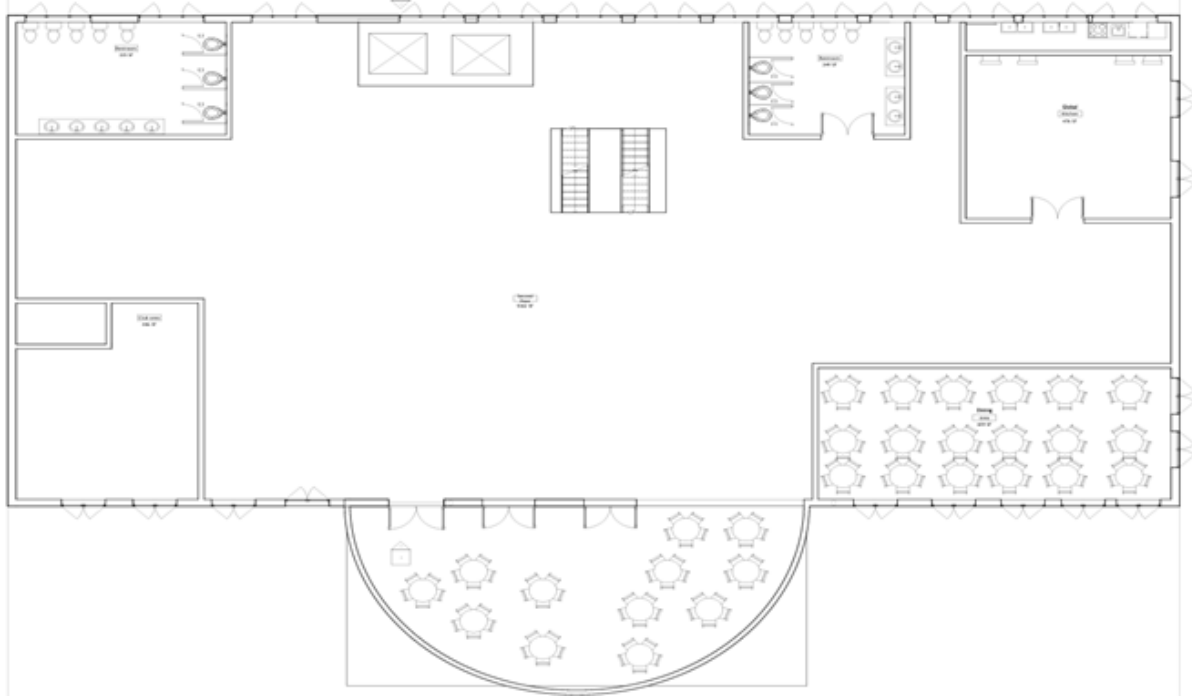


**Figure 9.** First floor plan of the Common Grounds Student Center.

**1<sup>st</sup> Floor (Public hub, Resource Center, Welcome Center, Security, outside dining +lounge):**

Lobby with a welcome center, resource center, security/monitoring station, indoor/outdoor modular seating, small international dining or grab-and-go kiosk, public notice boards, and event poster wall.

*The following plan highlights the arrangement of dining and student organization spaces on the second floor.*

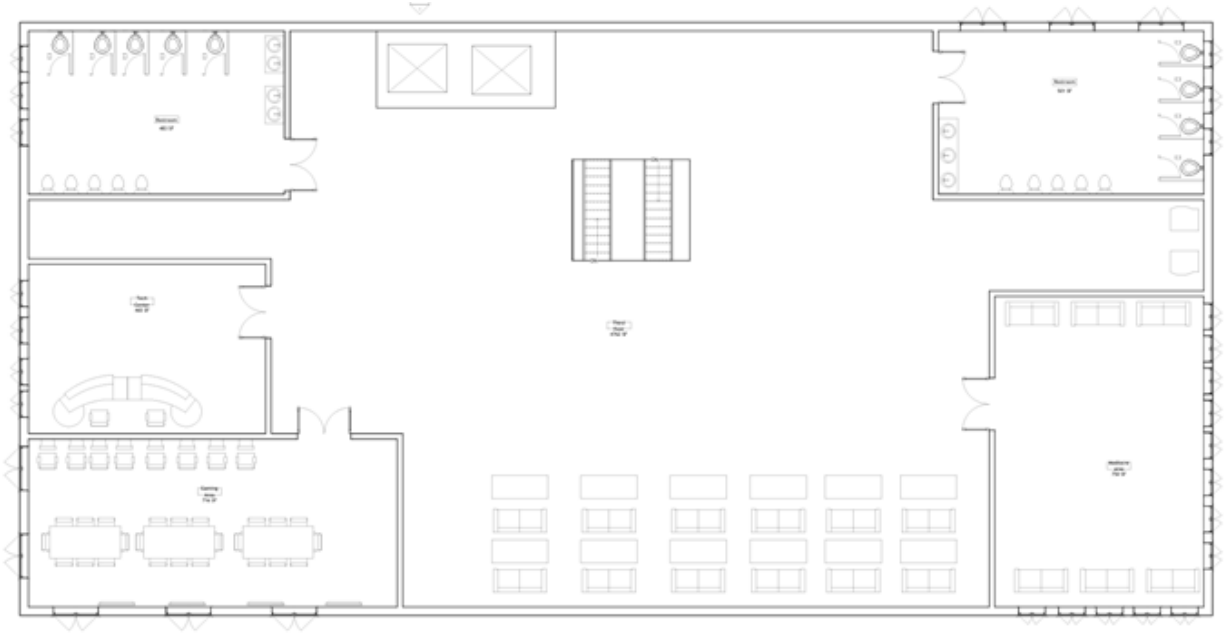


**Figure 10.** Second floor plan of the Common Grounds Student Center.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Floor (Full international dining & student organizations space):**

Plaza-style international dining area, modular student lounge with flexible seating for group meetings, reservable group meeting rooms (4-25 people), charging stations, and upgraded Wi-Fi access points.

Shown below is the third-floor layout, which focuses on academic and technology support areas.

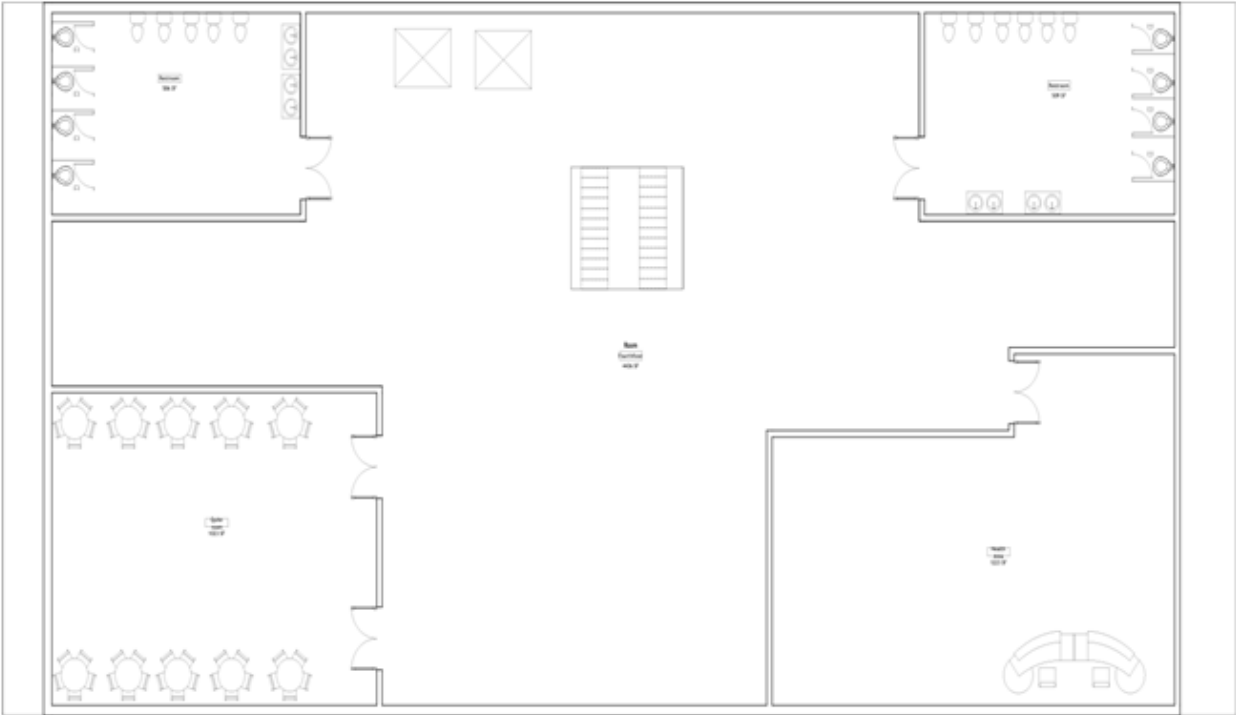


**Figure 11.** Third floor plan of the Common Grounds Student Center.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Floor (Academic support, Technology, gaming, Media):**

Academic support tutorial center with tutoring stations, computer/printing stations, tech support, gaming area, and media center.

*The final plan presents the fourth floor, emphasizing wellness, leadership, and quiet study spaces.*



**Figure 12.** Fourth floor plan of the Common Grounds Student Center.

**4<sup>th</sup> Floor (Wellness & leadership):**

Wellness counseling suites, quiet library nook with individual study carrels, computer/printing stations, mediation/quiet room, reservable group meeting space for faith-based organizations, and office space for student affairs and student organization advisors.

The rooftop plan, which highlights the green roof features informed by the sustainability survey and overall structural design, will be presented in Appendix B.

**Construction Timeline: CCNY “Common Grounds” Phased Implementation**

The construction phase will be implemented in four main phases over three years, as outlined below.

### **Phase A – Planning & Design (Months 0-6)**

A **Student Advisory Committee (SAC)** will be established, consisting of representative students by major, year, commuter/resident status, one faculty representative, and one administrator. The SAC will refine priorities from the 100-student survey, run focus groups, and approve final programming. An architect or firm in urban student centers will develop schematic floor plans, an accessibility plan, and the sustainability checklist. The outcome will be an approved schematic design and preliminary cost estimate.

### **Phase B – Approvals & Funding (Months 6-12)**

During this phase, campus planning and permit documents will be submitted to CCNY facilities and the NYC Department of Buildings for approval. The SAC will launch a funding plan combining student activity reserves, targeted alumni outreach, local grants, and potential corporate sponsorship for named spaces (e.g., Benny's Lounge). The goal is to secure funding commitments and permits.

### **Phase C – Construction & Fitout (Months 12-30)**

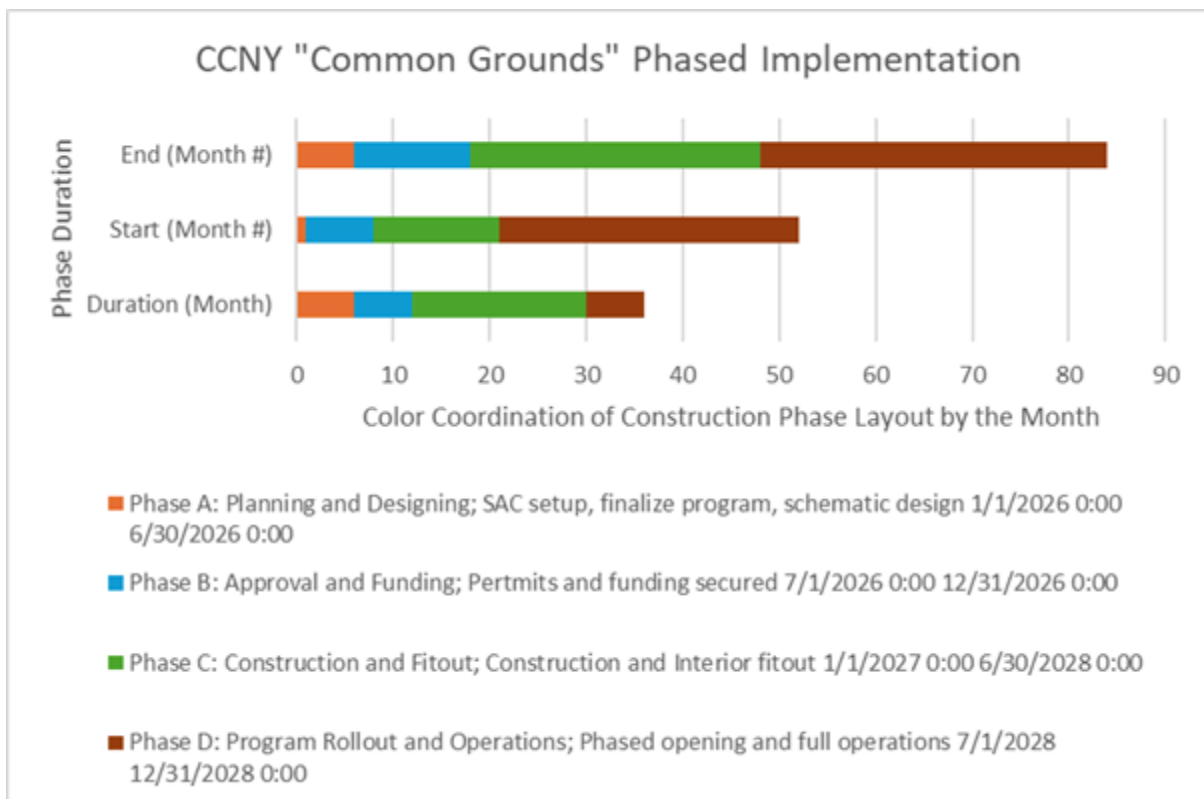
A contractor will be selected through competitive bids. Construction will include site preparation, structural work, the building core and shell, interior partitions, MEP (mechanical/electrical/plumbing) installation, and technology integration. Near the end of this phase, furniture, appliances, kitchen equipment, tutoring area shelving, and wayfinding signage will be installed. The outcome will be a completed building ready for inspection.

### **Phase D – Program Rollout & Operations (Months 30-36)**

After inspection approval, SAC will conduct soft opening events such as weekend pop-up events, tutoring sessions, and wellness program introductions. This will allow for user feedback

and adjustments to programming before a full opening that includes orientation events, student organization fairs, and wellness awareness days. The outcome is a fully operational facility with student-led programming.

The following Gantt chart (Figure 9) visually summarizes the planned timeline and duration of each construction phase described above.



**Figure 13.** Common Ground Phased Construction Plan

## Student Leadership and Governance

Student involvement will remain at the core of operations. The **Student Advisory Committee (SAC)** will oversee governance, manage tutoring and study space schedules, and organize monthly programs. A **student programming** fund—supported by usage revenue or campus activity fees—will finance events such as Benny/Bennie the Beaver nights, cultural celebrations,

and tutoring incentives. Designing the center with active student leadership ensures the facility stays dynamic, responsive, and engaging.

## **Technology, Accessibility, and Safety**

The technology and infrastructure phase will include comprehensive Wi-Fi mapping for all levels, with 6-8 charging stations per floor. Contractors will install an enterprise-level Wi-Fi backbone capable of supporting peak usage in lobbies, dining, and study areas. Additional features may include digital room-booking panels for reservable spaces. The SAC will organize ongoing student-run “Tech Help” hours in the tutoring center for device support.

The center will fully comply with ADA accessibility standards, including an elevator sized for a stretcher, tactile signage, and hearing-assistance systems in event rooms. Safety features will include clear egress routes, 24/7 security camera coverage (excluding private counseling rooms), and well-lit exterior entrances. Sustainability elements will prioritize LED lighting, energy-efficient HVAC systems, low-flow fixtures, and green areas or planter boxes if structurally feasible—aligning with best practices for sustainable student hubs.

## **Assessment and Continuous Improvement**

SAC will measure success through **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** focused on student engagement. These include weekly lounge/study area utilization counts, monthly program participation, and attendance in tutoring and wellness sessions. Academic impact will be evaluated through tutoring appointment data and self-reported GPA improvement. Student satisfaction will be assessed quarterly through short surveys. SAC will also monitor commuter versus resident usage and time-of-day access patterns to ensure equitable availability.

A **Student Assessment Committee** will maintain oversight to ensure risks and mitigations are managed effectively. Funding shortfalls will be mitigated by phased openings (e.g., launching one or two floors initially) and continued pursuit of alumni and grant support. Space limitations will be addressed with flexible furniture and reservable zones, allowing areas to serve multiple purposes throughout the day.

This Action Plan places students at the center—from design and construction to programming and long-term governance. The CCNY Common Grounds Student Center will not only stand as a physical space at 160 Convent Ave (40.816853, -73.950589) but also as a living, evolving program of events, tutoring, and student support designed to connect people, services, and ideas across campus. This approach follows established planning principles showing that student life hubs strengthen campus connectivity when they are designed and governed with students in the lead.

### Costs and Benefits

The estimated budget for the Common Grounds Student Center outlines the projected costs needed to bring this vision to life—from planning and design through final inspection and opening. The breakdown below highlights each construction phase and its corresponding expenses, reflecting a realistic investment in a long-term, student-centered facility.

Item	Cost (U.S. Dollars)
Pre-Construction	\$12,760,000
Construction	\$25,520,000
Post-Construction	\$4,250,001

Materials/Technology	\$150,000
<b>Estimated Total</b>	<b>\$ 42,650,000</b>

**Table 14.** Estimated Budget Breakdown for the Common Grounds Student Center

Following the estimated budget, it is also crucial to consider the long-term value this investment will bring to CCNY students and the campus community. A student center plays a vital role in enhancing campus life by fostering student engagement, collaboration, and belonging. It provides space for studying, socializing, and taking part in activities that help students develop leadership and communication skills outside of class (Association of College Unions International, 2023). These centers not only strengthen community connections, but they also improve academic performance by offering areas that encourage teamwork and personal learning. Additionally, student centers contribute to overall well-being by creating welcoming and comfortable environments that reduce stress and improve mental health (American College Health Association, 2024). Together, these benefits make a student center an essential part of a supportive and engaging college experience. And, honestly, who wouldn't appreciate having a quiet place to relax without being disturbed by a loud group of friends nearby, especially that one friend whose laugh can be heard across the library?

Note. Budget data and cost estimates were informed by multiple sources analyzing current construction trends and pricing in New York City (Citizens Budget Commission, 2025; NYC Estimating Services, 2025; Building Design + Construction, 2024).

## Conclusion

The CCNY's Common Grounds Student Center project is more than just a new building; it is an investment in the core of the CCNY community. By combining study, social, and wellness facilities under one roof, this proposal immediately addresses the gaps identified in both campus survey and citywide CUNY data. Students will have a central location to interact, recharge, and connect with essential resources that promote academic success and personal growth. Building this student center will not only increase the sense of belonging and engagement on campus today, but it will also create a legacy: a vibrant, sustainable space that will continue to shape the future of CCNY for generations to come.

## Our team—*Common Ground Force*

**Georgina Tobon Hernandez** is a second-year Chemical Engineering student where she combines technical rigor with a passion for sustainable development and student advocacy. With a solid foundation in experimental research, data analysis, and scientific communication, she has led initiatives that connect engineering principles with community-centered solutions. Outside of campus, she spends time outdoors, which highlights her commitment to create environments that inspire curiosity, foster connection between nature and individuals, and reflects the diverse needs of her peers. She plans to involve herself in the pharmaceutical field, changing the approach of how vaccines are produced.

**Edgar Azuara** is an extremely enthusiastic Computer Scientist with a specialty in making very innovative sites and keeping every task neat and clear with no confusion about what needs to be done. When there's organization and clarity on what needs to be done, it's absolutely meaningful to be extremely sure each and every task is done. He plays Soccer in his free time, and the matches are exceptionally long and exhausting, which helps with the idea of being able to persevere through something and still show his best during it. In the future, he is excited to see what websites he will make to influence the new forms of Media in daily life.

**Michelle Gadsden** is a driven Business Management and Administration major at CCNY with a passion for organization, leadership, and innovation. She enjoys coordinating projects, improving workflows, and supporting team success through clear communication and thoughtful planning. With a strong interest in Engineering and Technology, Michelle is dedicated to combining organizational strategies with innovative problem-solving to enhance processes and support technical projects. Her blend of analytical thinking, creativity, and collaboration allows her to develop efficient, goal-oriented solutions across diverse teams. Outside of academics, she spends her days with her playful cat, Nico, whose curious personality brings balance and warmth to her focused approach both in study and at home. Her future will consist of entrepreneurship and enterprise ownership.

**Karan Goswami** is a creative engineer with a specialization in structure design. He believes the smartest solutions come from combining deep technical ability with confidence, imaginative design, and mind. His commitment to physical fitness through badminton sharpens my focus and provides the endurance needed to tackle complex problems and long-term projects. He is dedicated to turning his ambitious thoughts and dreams into reality by working hard. In the future, he is planning to become a structural designer engineer where he will focus on new creative structural impact.

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