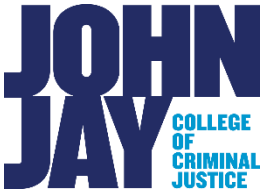
From Flames to Change:

An exploration of housing, fire and inequity



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Executive Summary

In May 2024, contributors from across the housing and fire safety system gathered in New York City to examine the interrelationship between housing conditions, social vulnerabilities, and fire risk, building on the themes raised by the Kindling report *The Invisible US Fire Problem*. The workshop was held in conjunction with a performance of Grenfell: In the Words of Survivors, a powerful play that uses the words of those who lived through the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London to explore themes of injustice, regulatory failure, and the structural conditions that perpetuate fire risk for marginalized communities. More than 30 participants from diverse sectors came together to reflect on the housing system and implications for fire safety in US cities.

Housing and fire safety are deeply connected: inadequate and poorly maintained housing poses heightened fire risk for occupants. An individual or household's housing situation (including limited or constrained choice) interacts with issues such as affordability, access, location, quality, safety, occupancy levels, tenure type, and resident or immigration status. These dynamics shape vulnerability, and inequity becomes most visible in the event of a fire. The extreme end of this spectrum includes the unhoused, who occupy structures entirely outside of regulatory systems with little or no fire protection.

Participants highlighted new challenges for fire services stemming from the housing crisis, including dangerous fuel loads and modern materials, that generate thick, toxic smoke, making navigation and response more difficult than ever before. These shifts, alongside systemic exclusion and underrepresentation in fire safety systems, underscore the need for inclusive leadership and collaborative solutions.

With these challenges established, participants turned to identifying root causes, key actors, and potential pathways forward. Fire inequity was traced to systemic bias, regulatory gaps, and chronic underinvestment. Participants emphasized the need to build stronger connections across disciplines and sectors, with residents and communities at the center.

In the absence of resident participation, fire safety systems are shaped by entrenched biases that ignore the lived safety concerns of marginalized communities. These preconceptions, embedded in broader systems of inequality, help explain why the people most at risk often live in the most fire-vulnerable buildings. Fire inequity, then, is not only about risk exposure but also about intersectionality and systemic vulnerability.

Participants from diverse backgrounds recognized the critical importance of collaboration across sectors. Learning from past incidents and sharing knowledge must include meaningful engagement with those who experience and navigate fire risk daily. The workshop concluded with a unified call for connection, leadership, accountability and transparency.

The challenge of fire safety in the built environment transcends traditional organizational silos and will require multi-faceted interventions. Yet to date, efforts to build the necessary networks have been limited and poorly funded by both government and the private sector. Participants agreed that diverse interests must come together to address this long-overlooked component of the U.S. fire problem.

Motivation and Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to all participants for their openness, collaboration, and shared commitment. Special thanks to Gill Kernick for facilitating, the Christian Regenhard Center for Emergency Response Studies (RaCERS) within John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY) for hosting in NYC, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for sponsoring the event, and St Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn for hosting the theatre performance.

An important backdrop to the NYC event was a workshop held in Portland, Oregon in 2023, convened by Kindling, John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY), and the Western Fire Chiefs Association (WFCA). The WFCA's commitment to creating space for dialogue on fire safety issues affecting unhoused people remains both inspiring and motivating. Fire service leaders from Seattle (WA), Vancouver (WA), Boise (ID), Eugene-Springfield (OR), and Tualatin Valley (OR) demonstrated the value of regionally grounded efforts to address fire as a challenge rooted in the broader housing crisis. The Portland workshop laid the intellectual groundwork for the NYC event, with both gatherings united by the theme of housing-related fire inequity.

Critical points of discussion in Portland that resonated in NYC included:

- The need for better and more consistent data collection and analysis.
- Challenges in tracking how individuals interact across fire services, hospitals, housing, and other systems. Improved data sharing and integration between agencies could reduce duplication, increase efficiency, and support more effective programs for specific communities.
- A call for stronger information sharing and program evaluation, particularly through partnerships with social service agencies and community organizations. Greater integration can also ease pressure on firefighters and other first responders.
- The importance of shelter programs that collaborate with public housing teams to reduce the number of unhoused people living on the streets.
- The need to address fire as a public health issue. Burn injuries among unhoused populations remain a significant concern among health professionals, a point underscored by the burn surgeon who participated in the Portland workshop.

The Portland workshop underscored the value of collective dialogue over siloed efforts, while also highlighting successes worth celebrating and scaling. Notably, locally developed programs and data systems in Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles, California offer promising models that could inform national initiatives. The motivation to improve fire safety for unhoused populations exists—but sustained support is needed for it to thrive.

Terminology

Grandfathering, or Grandfather Clauses - a situation where an old rule continues to apply to some existing situations while a new rule will apply to all future cases. This can mean that 'non-conforming' conditions may continue to exist. In the built environment, they enable a building to remain in its original state even after a new code has been released. For example, an apartment building built before a code stipulating requirements for a sprinkler system does not have to retrofit those sprinklers to meet the new code unless the building undergoes major renovation/structural works.

Rate of fire development – the speed at which fire grows from ignition until it becomes self-supporting as long as fuel and oxygen are available

Flashover – the conditions associated with fire in a room when the heat buildup from the fire is contained in the upper part of the room and is hot enough to release combustible vapors from fuels lower in the room, which subsequently causes all fuels in the room to ignite.

Building typologies [drawn from the report *The Invisible Fire Problem*]

- **Vulnerability-Protected**: Goes beyond minimum aspect of building code and includes additional provisions / enhancements aimed at protecting shelters and their vulnerable populations more robustly from fire than minimally compliant shelters.
- **Minimally Compliant**: Meets building code requirements at time of construction and are maintained to meet that level throughout their lifetime to provide a societally tolerated level of shelter vulnerability to fire. (This can include some grandfathered buildings.)
- **Under-Regulated**: May have met building code at time of construction, or not, and are inadequately maintained, have insufficient fire protection, may have illegal components, may be abandoned, etc. Also, persons may use the space for temporary or permanent shelter, legally or illegally. (This can include some grandfathered buildings.)
- **Unregulated**: Informal structure built outside of regulatory control; temporary materials and methods of construction may be used to provide minimal protection from some environmental effects; construction offers little or no fire protection; insecure tenure is common. Examples include tents, tarps, lean-to's, motor vehicles, shacks.
- **Non-sheltered**: No significant form of shelter, consisting of open sleeping, possibly with bedding or other cover (e.g., bridge, doorway, awning) for minimal protection against weather conditions. This is the lowest level of shelter / housing security.

1 Introduction

In 2022, Kindling released a report titled *The Invisible US Fire Problem*[1], which brought to light critical yet often overlooked issues, such as inequity, in fire safety across the United States. Building on this research, a workshop was held in New York City in May 2024 to delve deeper into some of the themes that emerged in the report and consider how we might begin to tackle them.

The event was inspired by the opportunity to host participants, the evening before, at St Ann's Warehouse[2] in Brooklyn to attend a performance of Gillian Slovo's groundbreaking play, Grenfell: In the Words of Survivors. Drawing directly from the voices of those who lived through the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London, the play told powerful human stories and explored themes of injustice, regulatory failure, and the structural conditions that place certain communities—particularly those historically underserved or failed by the system—at greater risk of fire.

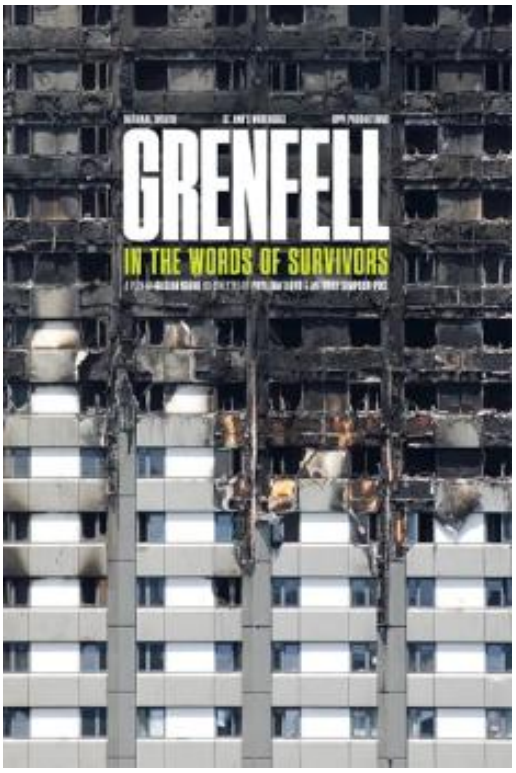

Image 1: Advertising poster for the play, Grenfell: In the Words of Survivors, shown at St. Ann's Warehouse, NYC, April - May 2024

Approximately thirty people attended the workshop from a range of perspectives, including the fire services, fire engineering, housing, code enforcement, and disaster response. The workshop was hosted by Kindling and the Christian Regenhard Center for Emergency Response Studies (RaCERS) within John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY), and facilitated by Gill Kernick, author of 'Catastrophe and Systemic Change' one of the first books published about Grenfell.

During the session, participants challenged themselves and each other to think about systemic change by 'making the water visible' to reveal the often-hidden factors that inhibit change and progress.[3]

The account that follows is one perspective on the interactions that took place at the workshop. It aims to highlight some of the critical themes and difficult conversations that emerged as we grappled with the pressing issue of fire inequity in the U.S.

[1] https://www.nfpa.org/news-blogs-and-articles/nfpa-journal/2023/03/03/homeless

[2] https://stannswarehouse.org/show/grenfell-in-the-words-of-survivors/

[3] This event built on a workshop held in Portland, Oregon that convened fire stakeholders on the fire problems of the unhoused and insecurely or vulnerably housed. That event, in co-sponsorship by the Western Fire Chiefs Association, was held in February 2023.

2 How housing failures endanger residents and fire services

The narrative of fire safety in the U.S. is often viewed as a triumph: there has been a significant reduction in fire-related deaths since 1980, largely due to the introduction of smoke alarms, enhanced building codes, and improved emergency response. However, the telling of this success story masks a more complex and troubling reality that still sees seven people (on average) die in home fires in the U.S. each day, and, for the first time in decades, there is an upward trend in the number of people dying in house fires[4]. Workshop participants quickly identified the current housing context as a significant and growing concern for fire services, driven by the evolving nature of residential fires and the convergence of economic pressures with aging, inadequate housing stock.

Image 2: Opening commentators (Credit: RaCERS)

In many U.S. cities, residents live in older buildings lacking modern fire safety features. Some of these structures are poorly maintained, while others are well-maintained but legally "grandfathered", meaning they are exempt from newer safety codes unless substantially renovated. While technically legal, grandfathered buildings can be dangerous. Critics argue that the policy allows landlords and developers to "cut corners," and circumvent the application of new codes which are designed, in part, to improve fire safety.

Because grandfathering exists within a broader under-regulated housing system—with weak enforcement and inconsistent oversight—code violations have proliferated. Many homes are now categorized as "fire vulnerable." [5] One participant cited data from the Bronx to highlight how

[4] Statistics released by FEMA show a 44% increase between 2013-2022: https://www.usfa.fema.gov/statistics/residential-fires/deaths.html

[5] See Invisible US Fire Problem: https://www.kindlingsafety.org/_files/ugd/e07ec8_7568e8990eec46b8b9cc9defdf2d5375.pdf and terminology

increased fire risk in public housing is deeply entangled with systemic racism and discrimination[6]—a theme that recurred throughout the day. As one attendee put it, "the most vulnerable populations live in the most vulnerable buildings."[7]

This problem extends beyond what is traditionally labelled "low-income housing". Even relatively affluent residents may occupy buildings that lack critical fire protection, often without realizing the risk until after a fire occurs.

People experience housing differently and, generally, in line with broader, systemic socio-economic conditions. An individual or household's housing situation (including limited or constrained choice) intersects with issues such as affordability, access, location, quality, safety, occupancy levels, tenure type, resident or immigration status, and more. These factors often serve as indicators of fire risk. In high-cost cities like New York, residents may be forced into overcrowded apartments, units with blocked or inadequate exits, or illegal basement or attic conversions. At the farthest margins of the housing spectrum are the unhoused, individuals who may live in improvised structures entirely outside the regulatory system or take shelter in buildings that are derelict or structurally compromised, often without even the most basic fire safety measures in place.

In a housing system that prioritizes financial capital, incentivizes building owners to insure rather than invest in safety improvements, and diminishes tenant rights, there are few mechanisms that support meaningful investment in fire safety by renters. Tenants often feel "unseen and unheard" by landlords, unable to challenge poor conditions or deferred maintenance—especially knowing that any improvements may lead to rent increases, eviction, or displacement[8]. As a result, the disproportionate burden of home fires continues to fall on the most vulnerable people and communities across the U.S.—and on the first responders charged with protecting them. As one participant noted, "the people that bear the most risk are the most vulnerable[9]".

Across the world, particularly in urban centres, demand for affordable and adequate housing outstrips supply and is leading to growing diversification of building use. In New York City, for instance, former office buildings are being converted into residential spaces, a trend that poses new challenges for fire safety systems and regulatory processes. As one participant put it: "[We are in] a new revolution where we are going to convert office buildings to residential. The codes are not on a par… all the fire safety built into commercial buildings will not exist for residential. *[10]*"

More broadly, workshop participants reflected on how contemporary residential fires differ from those of the past. Fires today "burn hot and fast" [11] due to the accumulation of everyday items made from petroleum-based materials. These fires produce thick, toxic, smoke and ash-based soot that coats firefighters' skin and gear—more dangerous than the fibre-based residues of 30 years ago. [12]

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[6] Workshop participant - Researcher

[7] Workshop participant – Housing representative

[8] Workshop participant – Non-governmental organization representative

[9] Workshop participant - Housing representative

[10] Workshop participant – Fire fighter and battalion chief

[11] Workshop participant - Housing representative

[12] Workshop participant - Fire fighter and battalion chief

In the workshop, firefighters described navigating high-rise or maze-like buildings filled with this smoke, often with limited access to water or functioning sprinkler systems (due to building owners reluctance to install "expensive" sprinkler systems), and unclear guidance on the use of elevators during emergencies.

These accounts were echoed by federal research acknowledging the dramatic change in fuel loads and fire behavior[13]. As one participant said, "The rate of fire development is completely different from 30–40 years ago, but we still rely on old systems to fight the enemy." [14] This rapid development accelerates the time to flashover and brings new challenges for incident command and operational response.

When these fast-developing fire incidents occur in buildings that are poorly maintained, under-regulated, or inadequately staffed by local fire services (such as the loss of the fifth firefighter in New York City), the fire safety system is fundamentally failing. The gradual decline in public investment in housing and fire services represents one of the most visible aspects of fire inequity. The remainder of this reflection turns to the hidden dimensions of this issue and the need to bring together diverse perspectives to think differently—and act differently—about fire safety in the U.S.

3 Power, bias, and making the water visible

With the context established, workshop participants turned their attention to surfacing the often invisible dynamics of fire inequity—beginning with identifying the diverse actors whose decisions shape fire risk and safety outcomes. This included policymakers, insurance companies, developers, and building owners with the power to influence how people live, as well as those impacted by those decisions: firefighters, first responders, residents, families, and communities.

Image 3: Workshop participants discuss other groups' ideas (Credit H.Underhill)

As participants mapped these stakeholders, underlying themes of bias, lack of recognition and voice, and disconnection were brought to the fore. The workshop became a space for collective reflection, where participants were challenged to think across silos and embrace collaborative problem-solving. As one participant noted, "It takes all of us working together to make a change."[15]

A key exercise involved analyzing how different actors perceive residents, and vice versa, and

[13] Kerber, S. (2012). Analysis of changing residential fire dynamics and its implications on firefighter operational timeframes. *Fire technology*, *48*(4), 865-891.

[14] Workshop participant - Fire fighter and battalion chief

[15] For further discussion and background see: https://www.kindlingsafety.org/_files/ugd/e07ec8_7568e8990eec46b8b9cc9defdf2d5375.pdf and NFPA's fire and life safety ecosystem https://www.nfpa.org/about-nfpa/nfpa-fire-and-life-safety-ecosystem

how those perceptions influence actions, policies, and outcomes. These conversations were often uncomfortable, revealing deep tensions across roles and institutions. Yet they laid an essential foundation for acknowledging the beliefs, assumptions, and structural biases that shape fire safety systems, and how those biases manifest fire inequity.

For many participants who attended *Grenfell: In the Words of Survivors* the night before, the lessons from resident Edward Daffarn's testimony hit hard[16] as the Grenfell Tower fire in London exemplifies what happens when biases about people and communities make their way into how codes and policies are created, enacted and enforced. Perceptions of residents as 'getting in the way', a 'nuisance', 'careless' or 'negligent'[17] set the tone for negative and unproductive interactions shrouded in an exclusionary form of top-down power that silences residents' concerns and depicts their knowledge and experience as less valuable or meaningful. Closer to home, the Twin Parks fire (2022) in the Bronx also exposed the devastating consequences of allowing bias and prejudice to take root within the fire safety system, as residents lived in deteriorating public housing with little recourse to raise concerns or demand improvements.

Both fires revealed parallel truths: the buildings required safety upgrades that residents could not afford or control; both housed ethnically and culturally diverse populations; and in both cases, residents' repeated warnings went unheard. These patterns illuminate how fire inequity is rooted in power, specifically, systems and structures that give voice to some while silencing others.

The silencing of residents and communities has implications for every other actor in the system. When decisions are made without community input, they lack critical insight to how safety measures are received, used, or resisted. In fact, residents often hold the most practical and context-specific knowledge about what will work and what will not – knowledge that is essential to effective fire safety. Too often, they are characterized, especially after large loss fires, as "immigrants, poor, or unfamiliar with safety practices," [18] erasing their lived experience and framing them as passive or problematic. In reality, these communities are often more exposed to risk because they are structurally confined to fire-vulnerable housing and denied the power to demand change.

More broadly, greater attention must be paid to how perceptions of the "other" shape decision-making processes—and how those perceptions determine whose voices are included, ignored, or actively excluded from conversations about how people live, how they learn about fire safety, and how fire impacts them or their communities. Fire inequity does not result from individual decisions alone, but from systemic patterns of exclusion that consistently devalue certain forms of knowledge and lived experience.

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[16] Edward Daffarn and other residents raised concerns about fire safety in the building many times as noted in Kernick, G. (2021) Catastrophe and Systemic Change: Learning from Grenfell and Other Disasters. London Publishing Partnership; Apps, P. (2022). *Show me the bodies: how we let Grenfell happen*. Simon and Schuster.

[17] Comments from workshop participants in stakeholder analysis exercise

[18] https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/what-a-fire-in-the-bronx-says-about-immigrant-life-in-new-york

Ultimately, fire inequity is an issue of intersectionality and vulnerability: those most marginalized are left to bear the greatest risk.

Image 4: Workshop participants reflect on the stakeholder analysis activity (Credit: B. Meacham)

4 People and knowledge within fire safety systems

"It's simply a matter of money... Retrofitting is expensive ... We know how to build fire resistant and fire safe structures, but we just don't do it[19]*."*

This observation by a workshop participant underscored a central tension in the fire safety system: the solutions are known but not implemented. Fire safety systems are interdependent by design—each component, from materials and alarms to fire doors and escape routes, relies on the others to function. When one piece fails, the whole system is compromised. Given the "cycles of abandonment"[20] and tacit acceptance of fire vulnerable[21] buildings, there is an urgent need to reject the assumption that another part of the system will expose and manage the safety failings. As one participant commented, adding a new code to respond to building vulnerability is ineffective: "trickle down fire safety does not work."[22]

Fire safety systems often rely on technical fixes, such as self-closing doors, mandated sprinklers, and call buttons, without addressing the human and systemic factors that drive risk. But fire risk emerges at the intersection of human behavior, structural conditions, and social systems. For example, a propped-open fire door may be seen as a safety failure, but for a family fostering connection and shared caregiving among neighbors, it's a meaningful part of daily life and a sign of

[19] Workshop participant – Housing representative
[20] Workshop participant – Academic researcher
[21] See terminology – page 12
[22] Workshop participant – Fire safety specialist

a healthy community. These human dimensions are often overlooked—or worse, weaponized to assign blame to residents for increasing fire risk, depicting them as 'careless'.[23]

Fire safety systems too often fail to consider diverse ways of knowing. Risk is not only technical—it's lived. Community knowledge, cultural practices, and everyday adaptations must be recognized as valid and valuable contributions to safety. A fire safety system that ignores them risks both failure and injustice. Residents are often the most knowledgeable about the realities and trade-offs of their living environments, and their insights are critical to designing solutions that are feasible, accepted, and effective.

But it's not only resident perspectives that go unrecognized. Siloed thinking also devalues the contributions of professionals across disciplines, revealing another layer of bias—this time within and between sectors. Fire safety systems are often shaped by assumptions about who holds valuable knowledge, and perceptions of those working in different silos can reinforce exclusion rather than collaboration.

While disciplinary silos can be essential for developing deep technical expertise—such as fire dynamics research—they must become more permeable to enable broader learning and real-world application. Fire educators, first responders, building inspectors, engineers, and community advocates each bring essential insights, and only through connection can their knowledge be translated into coordinated action. Without opening up to new perspectives, opportunities for cross-pollination and innovation are lost. For example, technical fire research becomes truly impactful when interpreted by tactical responders or adapted by educators who can bring that knowledge to the communities most at risk.

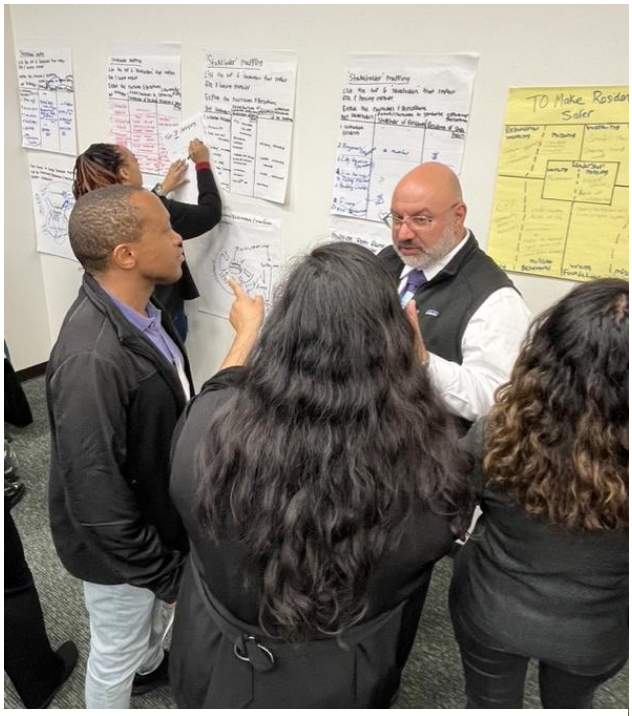

Image 5: The workshop encouraged conversation between different stakeholders (Credit H. Underhill)

Participants also reflected on fire safety education. While there are national programs that seek to reach a wider audience (for example by producing fire safety materials in a range of languages[24] or targeting areas at risk of wildfire[25]), it was acknowledged that fire safety education, on the whole, remains focused on middle-school children, failing to engage adults who will, through the course of

[23] Workshop participant – Fire services

[24] https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/home-fire-safety/safety-tip-sheets/easy-to-read-handouts-in-other-languages

[25] https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/wildfire/firewise-usa

their lives, transition to different housing contexts and be exposed to different fire risks.

Throughout the workshop, one message was clear: communication and collaboration are essential. Without dialogue across sectors—and without valuing community knowledge—opportunities for transformative change are lost. Fire safety must be reimagined as a shared responsibility. That starts by making all actors in the system visible, ensuring that those most affected are heard, and calling on all individuals to show up, not just as representatives of institutions, but as participants willing to engage, listen and learn across lines of difference.

The discussions emphasized the need for every actor within the fire safety system to be present, visible, and open to communication beyond their areas of expertise. To improve fire safety for all, we must create open spaces that welcome productive conflict, invite diverse perspectives, and support learning across boundaries. Fire inequity is not inevitable—but changing it will take all of us.

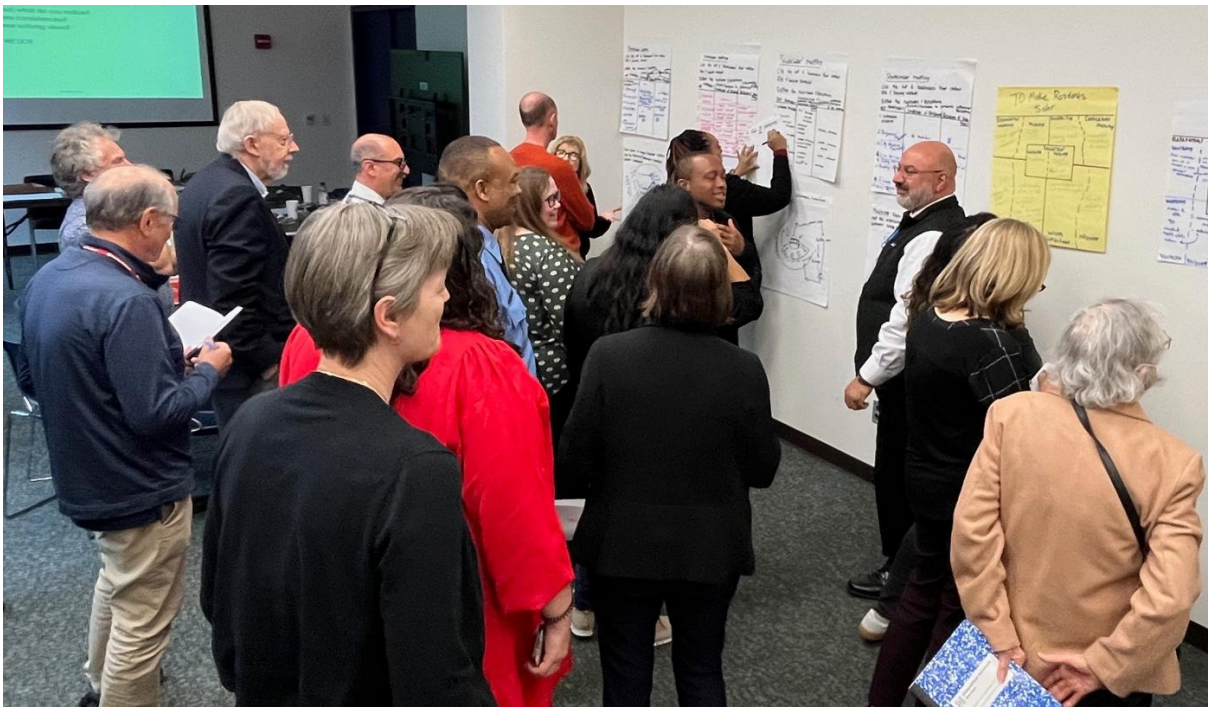

Image 6: Workshop facilitator, Gill Kernick, encourages connection and collaboration (Credit H. Underhill)

5 Conclusion: Leadership as action

The workshop brought together an unprecedented collection of participants representing public housing, fire inspection and prevention, firefighting, public fire education and disaster relief, fire protection engineering, code creation and enforcement, and public policy experts. Despite this breadth, participants acknowledged that tenant groups and housing advocates remain underrepresented and must be more meaningfully engaged. This gap in participation has consequences beyond representation alone. The lack of voice and representation within the fire safety system for the people who live with fire risk each day is central to fire inequity; without understanding how people experience fire risk and what they do to navigate it, solutions may be ineffective and inappropriate.

At the heart of fire inequity are the residents and communities who often experience these challenges directly but are frequently perceived by others within the system as lacking organization or knowledge and expertise to advocate effectively for themselves. This perception not only overlooks their lived experience but reinforces the very dynamics of exclusion that drive risk. A key takeaway from the workshop was the need to create open and safe spaces where diverse perspectives are welcomed, and productive conflict is encouraged. Improving fire safety for all will require ongoing learning-centered conversations that make room for discomfort, disagreement, and dissonance, held together by an ethic of humility, collaboration, and mutual respect.

Public officials have an opportunity to build social connection, reflect values of accountability and transparency, and simultaneously address public safety by bringing other actors into the conversation from a place of active and engaged leadership. Workshop attendees expressed confidence in many of the existing mechanisms through which different actors can demonstrate their leadership, such as the continued development of codes and standards, routine inspection practices, incident reporting, data sharing, and community risk reduction programs. However, "there isn't enough intentional strategic collaboration to bring different perspectives together"[26] on this issue.

Leadership must go beyond control and implementation: the process of putting the insights generated within the workshop space into action requires deep consideration of how decisions affect others, and why some voices continue to be excluded from those decision-making processes. Fire safety reform will depend on leaders' ability to make space for collaboration and learn from those whose experiences are typically left out.

Throughout the day, several critical questions emerged that offer insight into why some people in cities like New York remain disproportionately vulnerable to fire:

- How can interventions recognize the differing demands and needs of different communities? Uniform investments risk increasing inequity.
- Where do lines of responsibility for fire safety intersect with systemic inequity? Fire safety is a shared responsibility—between fire services, property owners, residents, building regulators, and elected officials.
- Who is accountable, and what pathways exist for people to challenge unsafe conditions?
- How can tenants and small business owners be meaningfully engaged in fire safety?
- Do some individuals or organizations benefit from the status quo? What would transparency look like?
- Who decides how resources are distributed, and who is left out?
- What role should the engineering community play in enhancing fire safety in existing buildings, where comparatively little investment is made in fire safety strategies?

The final stage of the workshop focused on identifying ways forward. A resounding call for collaboration and connection was heard. Suggested areas for further action include:

[26] Workshop participant – NGO representative

- Ongoing consultation and learning exchanges
- Broadening participation – including partnerships with tenant and housing advocacy networks
- Documenting and amplifying this issue within existing communities of practice, including fire services, fire protection engineering, code development, disaster risk reduction, public health, housing, and regulation.

“It takes all of us to make a change”

Grounded in a shared understanding that fire is an issue of inequity, the workshops in New York City and Portland brought people together from across the fire safety system to share, learn, and connect. The challenge of fire safety in the built environment, including for the unhoused, transcends traditional organizational silos and will require multi-faceted, community-rooted interventions supported by a wide range of actors. Until now, meaningful action to build and sustain these networks has been limited, and largely unsupported by government funding. These networks are often built by individuals and carried forward by people with lived experience who are willing to show up, do more, and collaborate with their neighbours.

On both coasts, participants agreed: diverse interests must come together to make progress on this overlooked and often invisible aspect of the U.S. fire problem. The work has begun—but only through shared responsibility, equity-centered leadership, and collective action will lasting change be possible