

Van Alen Institute and Times Square Alliance to Host Crossroads Conversations Public Program Series at the base of the Red Steps in Times Square

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Series launches on March 20 to connect passersby in conversation about their thoughts on immigration

Future issue-specific programs approach health, the environment, sexuality and infrastructure

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New York City (March 17, 2017) – Today Van Alen Institute and Times Square Alliance announced *Crossroads Conversations*, a public program series hosted at the base of the Red Steps in Times Square that invites passersby from all walks of life and political convictions to engage in thoughtful dialogue on some of the most pressing issues of our time in an iconic public space at “The Crossroads of the World.”

Harnessing the distinctive power of public space as a platform for unexpected encounters and compassion between strangers, *Crossroads Conversations* asks: What would it be like to candidly talk to a person with differing views? The program invites passersby to participate in 10-minute conversations with a fellow stranger facilitated by journalists at the base of the Red Steps, encouraging people from across the nation and around the globe to reveal multifaceted personal beliefs, provoke robust debate, and find common ground with those who may share differing viewpoints.

“It’s fascinating how the election process made evident that discussions on social media do not compare to those of public space. More than ever, public space is where we can learn from each other,” said Van Alen Institute Executive Director David van der Leer. “We are excited to hear the range of outlooks and witness moments of understanding arise at the Red Steps.”

“Crossroads Conversations builds on Times Square’s role as a central and symbolic public space where passionate voices and opinions are exchanged,” said Tim Tompkins, the President of the Times Square Alliance.

A pilot *Crossroads Conversations* event was hosted in December 2016 in immediate response to the divisions evidenced following the 2016 national election. The pilot event fostered compelling discussions and unforeseen viewpoints, inspiring Van Alen Institute and Times Square Alliance to organize future events within a multi-month series hosted at the base of the Red Steps.

The first event in the series will focus on immigration, and take place on Monday, March 20 at 6 pm for one hour. Upcoming events will be hosted with partner design and urbanism-oriented organizations and align with timely issues: On April 7, a health-focused conversation corresponds with World Health Day; an April 21 event on the environment will be held in advance of Earth Day; on April 25, we’ll ask participants to share their thoughts about what gender and sexuality mean to each of us; and the May 16 program, presented in conjunction with

NYCxDesign and Van Alen Institute's spring festival, *Arteries: NYC in Circulation*, will focus on infrastructure.

Following the thematic programs, Van Alen Institute will distill key ideas that emerged from the conversations into a set of "Word on the Street" reports available to the press and on vanalen.org, offering a capsule of participants' perspectives, a complement to media and political narratives that can be interpreted by everyday people and inform the work of organizations focusing on a given topic.

All *Crossroads Conversations* events are free and open to the public. Advance registration is not required. For more event details, visit vanalen.org/projects/crossroads-conversations and timessquarenyc.org/events/crossroads-conversations/index.aspx.

About Van Alen Institute

At Van Alen Institute, we believe design can transform cities, landscapes, and regions to improve people's lives. We collaborate with communities, scholars, policymakers, and professionals on local and global initiatives that rigorously investigate the most pressing social, cultural, and ecological challenges of tomorrow. Building on more than a century of experience, we develop cross-disciplinary research, provocative public programs, and inventive design competitions.

Crossroads Conversations is a continuation of Van Alen Institute's broader inquiry into issues of public space, explored in such initiatives as *Building Equity*, a series of workshops to explore how civic space can be more equitable; *Opportunity Space*, a competition for a temporary, mobile structure that will support economic opportunity and social inclusion in and around a park in Malmö, Sweden; and *Ecologies of Addiction*, a data-collecting research initiative exploring how the built environment impacts addiction in London, organized with Imperial College London's Sustainable Society Network. Van Alen Institute, which has organized design competitions for more than 120 years, developed the 1998 competition that led to the realization of the Red Steps, which have become an icon of one of the world's busiest crossroads.

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About Times Square Alliance

The Times Square Alliance, founded in 1992, works to improve and promote Times Square - cultivating the creativity, energy and edge that have made the area an icon of entertainment, culture and urban life for over a century.

In addition to providing core neighborhood services with its Public Safety Officers and Sanitation Associates, the Alliance promotes local businesses; encourages economic development and public improvements; co-coordinates numerous major events in Times Square (including the annual New Year's Eve and Solstice in Times Square celebrations); and advocates on behalf of its constituents with respect to a host of public policy, planning and quality-of-life

issues. The Alliance's district covers most of the territory from 40th Street to 53rd Street between 6th and 8th Avenues, as well as Restaurant Row (46th Street between 8th and 9th Avenue).

Website: www.TimesSquareNYC.org

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