Future City Lab: What If?

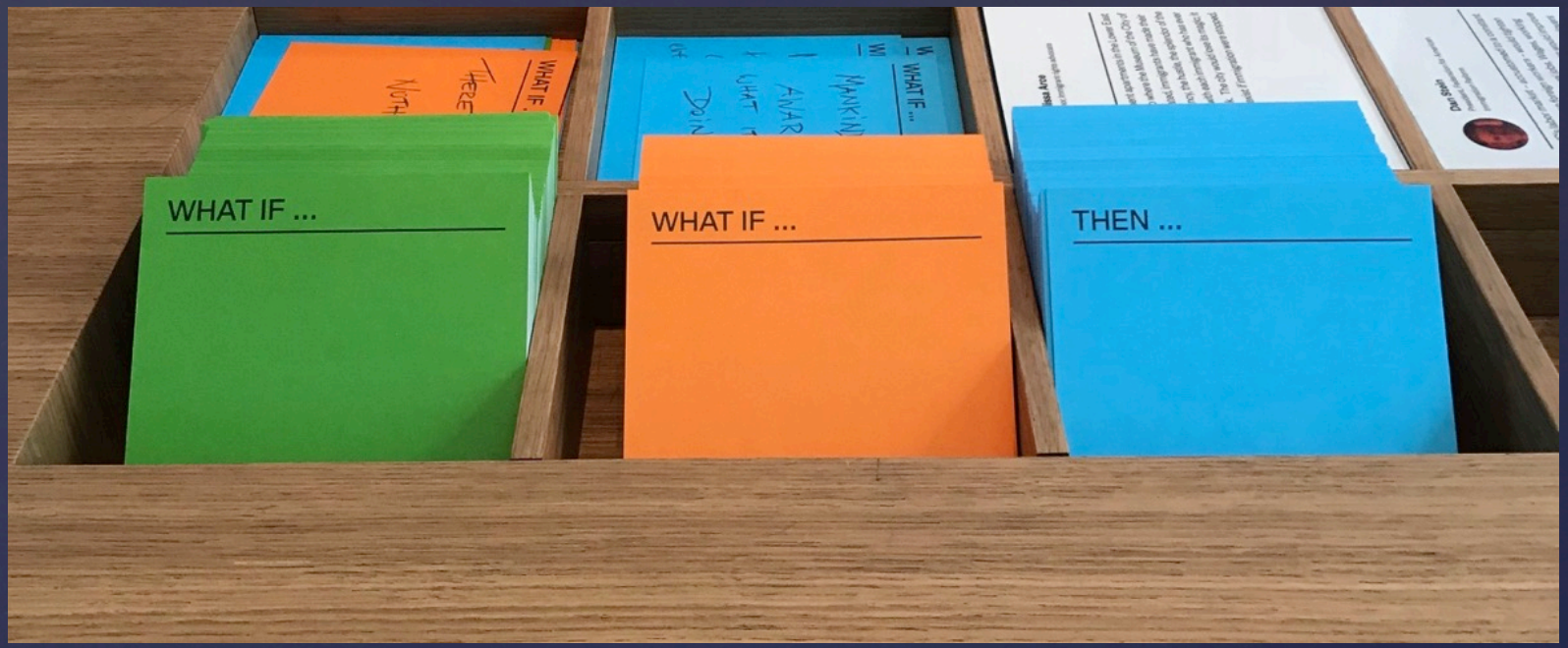
{ Questioning What We Know

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

www.mcny.org/education

What is a "What If?"

At the Museum of the City of New York's *Future City Lab*, visitors are encouraged to ask big questions on how to improve the city. Their question starts with a "What If…" and ends with what would happen: "Then…" The Lab's Director collects the visitors' questions and asks experts to respond to a few. The conversation is always changing and reflects the big questions our visitors care about most.


WHAT IF ...
WHAT IF ...
THEN ...

WHAT IF ...

WE CONVERTED TWO of the SIX CAR ROADS AROUND MANHATTAN INTO A GREEN WALK/BIKE PATH

Cy Adler
2/6/18

WHAT IF ...

PUBLIC TRANSIT STOPPED RUNNING LATE AT NIGHT, AS IN MOST OTHER CITIES?

Sam Schwartz
Transportation engineer,
former NYC traffic commissioner

New York City would become second-rate. We are the city that never sleeps, and we need trains running at all times. It would also be a blow to many hard-working, low-income people who work the midnight shift.

WHAT IF ...

all the taxi's were electric

-XOXO-

Owen Gutfreund
Urban historian, Hunter College, CUNY

I think this would be terrible. "The city that never sleeps" needs 24-hour transit, not just to support all the businesses related to the city's world-renowned nightlife, but also for the countless workers whose days end long after midnight or start long before sunrise—at the wholesale fish and produce markets, at the airports, in the hospitality and tourism sectors, in entertainment, and in financial services.

WHAT IF ...

New York's transportation system was subsidized by those who stand to profit off it's success?

WHAT IF ...

These two small words open up a world of future possibilities unconstrained by today's realities. They don't just pose a question; they propose an idea about how things could be in the future.

The *What If Table* offers the views of knowledgeable New Yorkers on a variety of questions. Take a seat at the table and compose your own "What if ..." questions or react to the questions you see. The ideas and discussion will always be changing, and the conversation continues online at mcny.org/nyatitscore, where selected questions from visitors in the gallery will be discussed by experts.

What if *we* give it a try?

www.mcny.org/whatif

What if?

Steps:

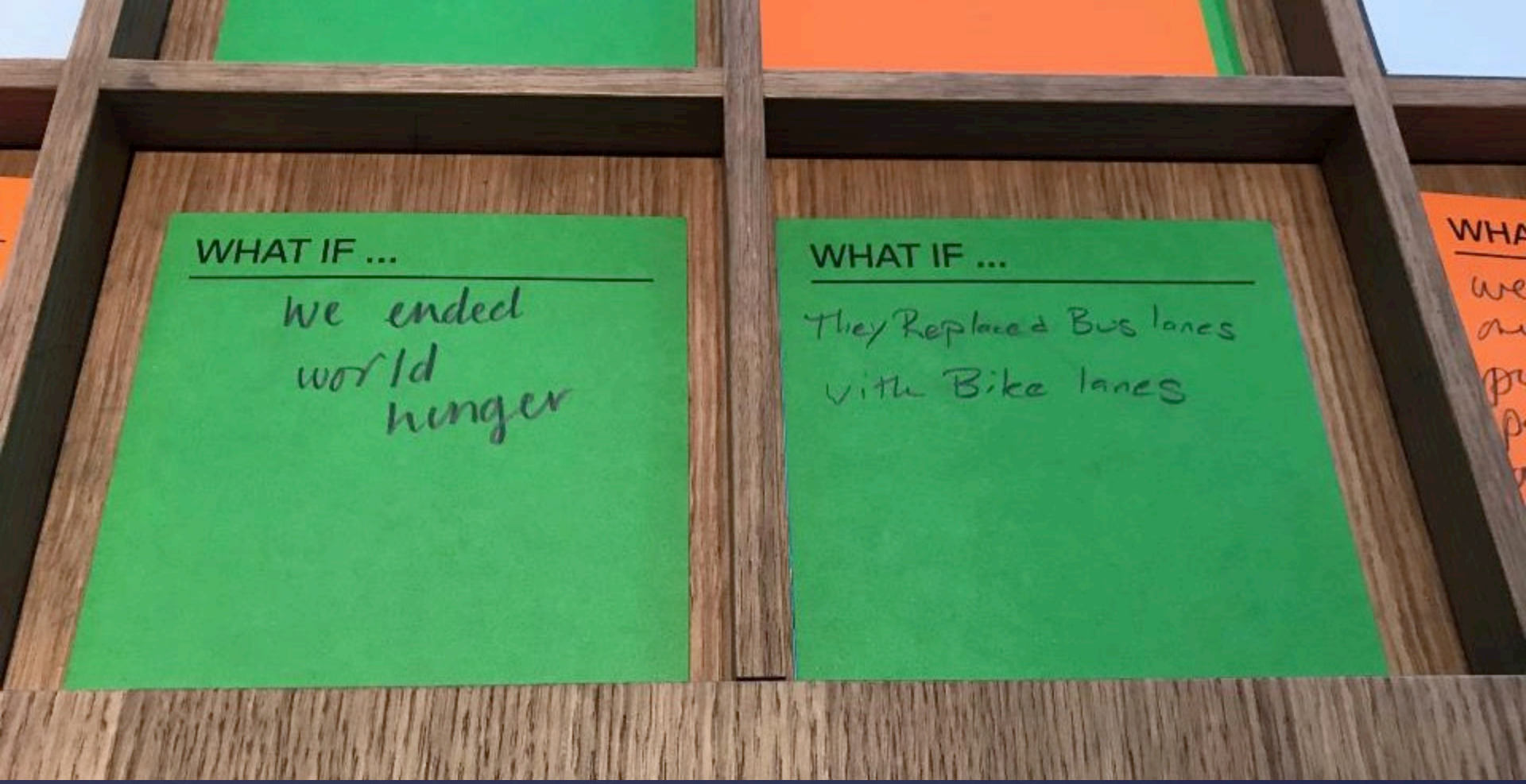
- Review visitor questions on the Museum's website.
- What problem are they trying to address?
- What do we know about this problem?
- Review expert responses.
- What arguments do we find the most convincing?
- Can we think more deeply about the issue?

Making our own "What Ifs?"

Before making your own "What If?" question, think about the following:

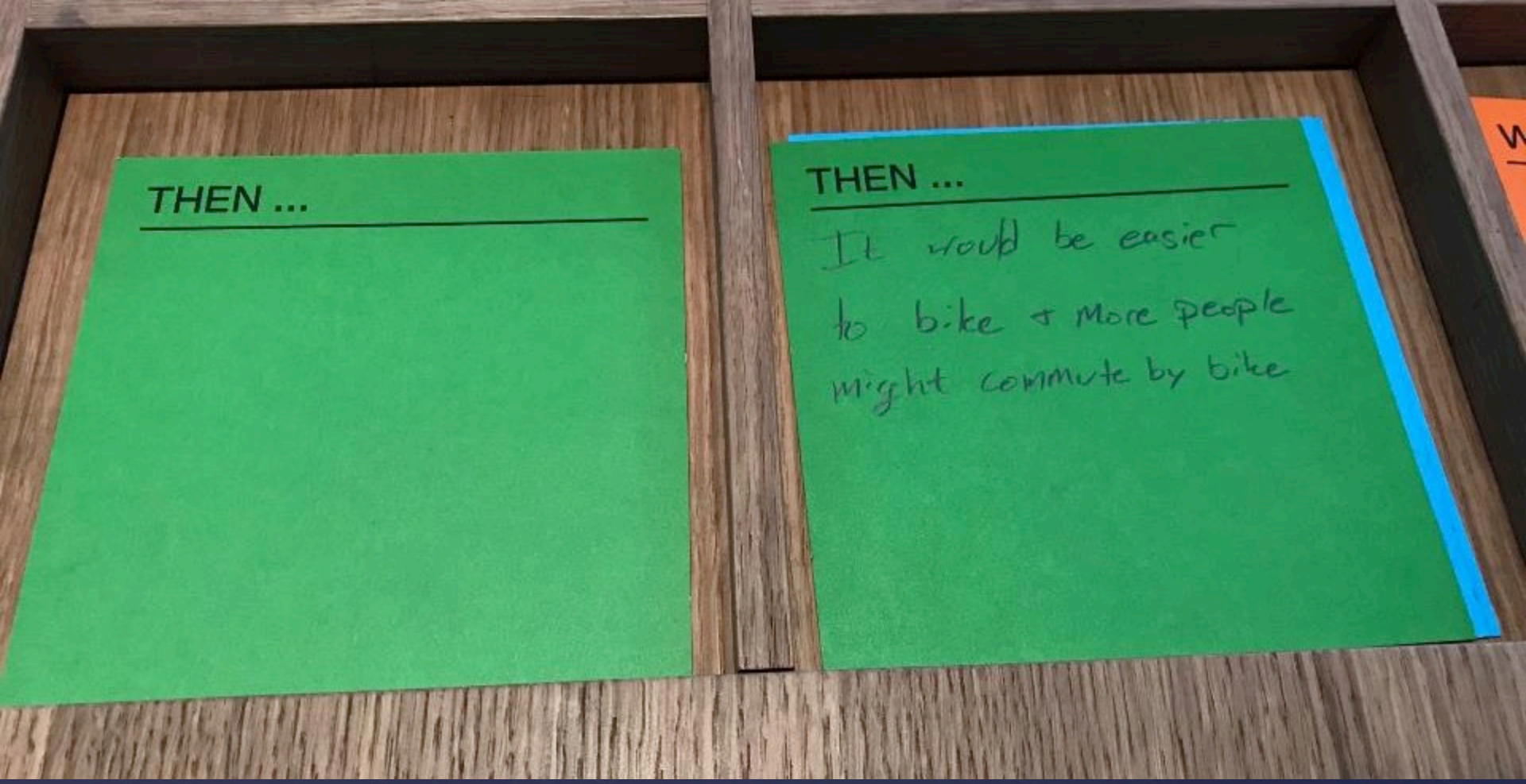
- What problem would I like to solve?
- What *specific* approach (or *strategy*) could be used to address it?
- What are the approach's likely benefits (the "pros")?
- What are its likely downsides (the "cons")?
- Given the pros and cons, is the overall outcome likely to be good or bad?

Once you've answered these questions, formulate your own "What If?" question and its likely result (*"Then…"*).



Before starting, look at the two "What If?" questions above.

Which is worded more effectively? Why?



Now look at the two "Thens" for each question.

It looks like the person who asked Question 1 gave up. Why might that be? Why is the card on the right more helpful as we problem-solve for a better city?

Small Group Work

- What problem would I like to solve?
- What *specific* approach (or *strategy*) could be used to address it?
- What are the approach's likely benefits (the "pros")?
- What are its likely downsides (the "cons")?
- Given the pros and cons, is the overall outcome likely to be good or bad?

What if _____*?*
Then: _____