One afternoon last spring, America SCORES, a nonprofit dedicated to providing underresourced communities with opportunities to excel in soccer, literacy, and service learning, convened more than 750 of their poet-athletes from participating New York City public schools at their annual Jamboree at Columbia’s Baker Athletic Field. The Jamboree was a day filled with fun, soccer, and literacy building. In previous years, America SCORES Executive Director Shannon Schneeman had struggled to find a suitable location for this culminating event, particularly one within their budget.

The plight of finding adequate programming space is one common to most nonprofits. The West Harlem Development Corporation (WHDC), the primary vehicle through which commitments of the West Harlem Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) are carried out, recognized this dilemma and came up with a solution. The WHDC opted to employ part of the CBA’s In-Kind Facilities and Services benefit to request the use of Columbia University (CU) space on behalf of local community groups. CU’s Office of Government and Community Affairs (GCA) coordinates with the WHDC to facilitate the requests. Since the start of this process in fall 2016, there have been more than 25 in-kind events at Columbia.

The WHDC receives the requests directly from organizations located in Manhattan Community District 9 via a twice-yearly application process. To increase the likelihood of CU availability, requests are solicited a semester in
advance of the desired date. For example, a request for January–June 2019 would be submitted in November 2018.

Schneeman remarked, “Our ability to serve over 750 poet-athletes is only possible because of organizations like WHDC and CU, who demonstrate the kind of dedication and enthusiasm that we seek to instill in our poet-athletes every day!” Her remarks underscore exactly what the CBA was designed to create: opportunities that directly benefit the fabric of the West Harlem community. For more information about the in-kind space process, contact communityaffairs@columbia.edu.