

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT



INTRO TO THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides information and recommendations to support future community engagement initiatives. It is based on the Place Matters project team’s experience engaging community members in North Calgary and is intended to serve as a resource for community organizations coordinating similar future initiatives.

CHOOSING ENGAGEMENT METHODS

The Place Matters project coordinated four engagement activities, representing three distinct approaches to listening to community member voices and perspectives, each with their own benefits and limitations as described below. Taken collectively, all three approaches complimented each other over the course of this project to provide both a breadth and depth of perspective, as well as qualitative and quantitative data.



A key lesson learned is that approaching community engagement with a variety of methods removes barriers to engagement and contributes to a more representative understanding of community perspectives and priorities.

Table 8. Engagement Method Benefits and Limitations

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY	BENEFITS	LIMITATIONS
<p>Community Events: Public events designed to provide a source of joy for attendees while simultaneously encouraging them to provide their perspective on pre-determined issues and questions.</p>	<p>Provide community members an opportunity to create new connections with their community and the project team.</p> <p>Can be a source of joy and entertainment and education for attendees.</p> <p>Provide the project team with the opportunity to solicit insights from the community in a variety of creative ways, from voting stations to video interviews to community tours.</p>	<p>Require a relatively high degree of effort to plan, execute and analyze the resulting data.</p> <p>Provide less structured data than other engagement methods, heavily dependent on the structure of engagement activities.</p> <p>Occur as a single moment in time with limited flexibility to pivot or modify the day of the event.</p>

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY	BENEFITS	LIMITATIONS
<p>Semi-Structured Interviews: One-on-one conversations (online or in person) structured to obtain insight around the interviewee's knowledge and experience.</p>	<p>Flexible and conversational approach that supports the development of a personal relationship between the interviewer and interviewee.</p> <p>Can explore issues of specific interest to the project team in detail, and in response to the interviewee's specific knowledge.</p> <p>Can be modified between interviews to explore new topics once a concept or issue is well understood based on previous conversations.</p>	<p>Engage a limited number of community members due to the effort to coordinate, execute and analyze the data.</p> <p>Provide a detailed understanding of processes and perspectives, but do not allow the project team to quantify the magnitude or frequency of the perspectives provided.</p>
<p>Online Surveys: Digital surveys with pre-determined questions distributed via email or anonymous link to audiences of interest.</p>	<p>Provide an opportunity to efficiently reach a large number of community members.</p> <p>Can provide a deeper understanding why issues are important through qualitative data (e.g., open text questions regarding project priorities) and/or the magnitude and frequency of topics through quantitative data (e.g., multiple choice or rank order questions).</p> <p>Allow engagement teams to link multiple data points together (e.g., community member demographic information with the perspectives they provided).</p> <p>Facilitate engagement from individuals who may find it challenging to schedule time for interviews or attend events.</p>	<p>Potentially less engaging than other methods with limited response rates, depending on the existing relationships with the community members being targeting and the incentives offered.</p> <p>Less opportunity to create meaningful or personal connections between the project team and the community members.</p> <p>Digital Survey tools and data require a degree of experience to design and manage.</p>

PLANNING ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

Community engagement events require a relatively large effort on behalf of the project team and were the subject of reflection which resulted in a summary of lessons learned presented below.

TOPIC	LESSON LEARNED
EVENT PLANNING	
Event Promotion and Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal outreach requires pre-existing networks and a high amount of time and effort on the part of the organizers compared to digital advertising. However, it's free and targeted invitations and pre-registration accounted for approximately 50% of event attendees, demonstrating the success of personal outreach through existing networks. • Engagement through partnership facilitated outreach to numerous local community organizations and leveraged existing networks of trust more effectively than trying to start from scratch. • Combining the prioritization event with an established community event (e.g., partnering with the MPC Foundation and Northern Hills Community Association on Neighbour Day) significantly boosted attendance. • Increasing event visibility with outdoor components including signage, food trucks and activities, encouraged walk-in visitors.
Collaboration and Co-Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning a large event is time intensive, as is collaboration. The core planning group met frequently in the months leading up to the events. When using a co-development model for event planning, additional time may be needed to accommodate discussion and consensus building. • Having regularly scheduled meetings is a helpful way to keep a planning cadence and to ensure key partners are involved in all decisions. • Memorandums of Understanding documenting roles, responsibilities, and time commitments are helpful when bringing in project partners and managing expected commitments before, during, and following an engagement. • Key activators and other community partners have competing time commitments and priorities, ample lead time should be allowed to ensure they are engaged in the planning. • A co-development approach to planning and facilitation was successful in drawing on diverse expertise and ensuring the events were engaging to different audiences. • A collaborative approach brought in partners with in-kind resources (e.g., space, registration systems, event materials, technical equipment) in addition to their knowledge, skills, and community connections. • Having an event plan and facilitation plan supported communication of logistics to a broader team on the day of the event when additional staff and volunteers were brought in to support.

TOPIC	INSIGHT
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	
Community Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event participants and co-facilitators identified that bus tours were an engaging way to bring people together to foster discussion, meet others, and learn about the local community. • The most challenging element of community tours was managing bus capacity/anticipating attendance rates. Bus tour registration closed once at capacity, however there was attrition on the day of and buses were not full. • When planning community tours as part of community engagement, there is a balance between giving information and gaining feedback. Ample time should be given for learning and touring and for gathering feedback and ideas. In addition to discussions, additional ways to capture data (e.g., personal written reflections) should be used to compliment to verbal dialogue. • Video tours could be created to facilitate future in-person or asynchronous digital engagement. • Outdoor discussions can be difficult when there is competing background noise; a proper space and set up for dialogue should be considered.
Joyful Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food, family friendly activities, and diverse ways to engage attendees helped attract individuals to the event and encouraged them to stay longer. • Play areas and games were immediate attractions for children, many of whom played for a long time. Parents could be seen participating in some of the more formal engagement opportunities while their children stayed engaged in play, suggesting that the play opportunity helped facilitate adult engagement. • The food trucks and play areas had a larger draw than some of the engagement pieces at the general event and not all attendees participated in the engagement boards. Consideration should be made around the visibility and layout of engagement components, as well as having volunteers encouraging participation in the full breadth of activities. • Committing to having food available at an event can be challenging when event attendance is uncertain, as much as possible ensure that everyone has a chance to eat.

Engagement Stations

- A welcome booth was helpful for greeting attendees and introducing them to the various areas they could visit and how they should navigate the engagement stations.
- Stations are useful mechanisms to structure community member feedback around specific questions and can provide interesting and or unique ways for community members to respond (e.g., sticky notes, voting with physical tokens).
- Engagement stations are 'fun' ways for community members to have their say, provided they are designed in interactive ways and address topics that are of interest to event participants.
- Engagement stations can create choke points if multiple attendees show up to the station at the same time. It's important to have event volunteers supporting the stations to encourage thoughtful but timely completion of station activities.
- Providing written instructions or context in English only may create an unnecessary barrier for some participants. Similarly, question wording or concepts may be abstract or ambiguously interpreted. It's important to have event volunteers available at stations to guide participants, as well as pictorial cues to provide additional context were appropriate.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENT RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Don't Lose the Dialogue: Large events create energy and excitement, but there still needs to be time for in-depth and meaningful discussion to avoid leaving questions unanswered and voices unheard. Ensure the event plan includes the time and mechanisms necessary to capture community member feedback.

- The more time it takes a community member to provide their feedback, the less time they will have for other engagement activities. There is a balance between thoughtful reflection and contribution and providing opportunities for everyone to be heard.
- Having note takers and video recordings are valuable ways to ensure verbal feedback and observations aren't lost.

2 Leverage Community Networks: Engagement is easier when you work with individuals or organizations who are already connected to the community. When starting an engagement event, identify key players and networks within the community and work with them to engage a broader audience. Personal and professional connections are extremely useful when relying on targeted outreach as part of an engagement strategy.

3 Maintain Relationships: Some community members may be interested in the project beyond participation in a single event. Ensure there are opportunities to engage and inform the individuals you engage beyond a single point in time.

- Start a formal contact list for people/organizations open to getting information about the project and any future engagements.
- Leverage digital/social media assets

to keep the project 'alive', share small learnings to-date, and communicate upcoming opportunities.

- Identify key individuals for potential follow-up with subsequent engagement activities (e.g., interviews).

4 Clearly Define Roles and Responsibilities:

Community engagement initiatives may involve loose networks of collaborators including volunteers, non-profits, community organizations, consultants, and City departments. Memorandums of understanding or terms of reference should be established early on to help all project partners understand the project's purpose and their commitment to it, including engagement, time, resources, and deliverables.

5 Incorporate Joyful Give Back: Community events provide an opportunity to give back to community members through entertainment, social connection, and education. Individuals will be drawn to an event, and subsequent events, when they experience the moments of joy giving back can provide.

- Diverse communities may experience joy and entertainment in different ways however, gathering around food has universal appeal.
- Events should be structured to provide opportunities for learning about the issues being discussed, as much as they are about providing input.
- The results of the event should be shared with the people who helped generate them through whatever mechanisms are most appropriate (e.g., newsletters, social media, follow up events.).

6 Inclusivity and Accessibility are Fundamental: At a public event it can be hard for all individuals to feel like they made meaningful contributions or had the opportunity to be heard. Barriers to participation should be thoughtfully considered and addressed prior to the day of the event so that all contributions are tangible and opportunities for discussion are inclusive.

- Consider providing information that's necessary for participation in multiple formats and/or languages.
- Ensure volunteers are available to facilitate participation when necessary.

7 Expect the Unexpected: When engaging large groups of individuals outside of a tightly managed context, there will always be unexpected reactions and scenarios. It never hurts to have a Plan B and Plan C in the event Plan A doesn't go as planned.

8 Don't Forget the Data: Engagement events are a mechanism for community members to share their knowledge and perspectives in ways that the project team can generate insight from to drive meaningful change. Ensure that in addition to being enjoyable, the activities planned will provide the project team with data to answer meaningful questions.

- Opportunities for engagement should be grounded and practical to the point their purpose is obvious to all participants.
- It can be challenging to compare data across multiple events when it is collected differently – consider longitudinal data management if you plan to do longitudinal engagement.
- Collecting data shouldn't create a barrier to participation, not every attendee will fill out a pre-registration form or take

the time to complete an activity and that's okay, the data you do collect is still valuable even if it's not 'perfect'.

9 Commit to Showing Up: When planning engagement events, it's important that the project team is as engaged as they are asking the community to be. Everyone who is involved in a community initiative needs to put skin in the game show up as part of building trust with the community.

10 Follow Up: Community engagement events can create as many questions as they answer. As part of overall project planning, opportunities to follow up with event community members should be anticipated to continue exploration of key topics and perspectives.



COMMUNITY ADVOCATE TOOLKIT



INTRO TO THE TOOLKIT

Outdoor public space projects don't come with a manual documenting every step or requirement that will guarantee success. Different projects require different partnerships, have different funding and permitting requirements, and engage community in different ways. However, there are a general set of activities or steps that most projects go through; this section of the report provides guidance and resources to assist community advocates in successfully navigating these steps. This content is a synthesis of insights from subject matter experts, including community advocates who have successfully completed projects of their own, and City officials and employees who support the process for developing and enhancing outdoor public spaces.

The CA Journey diagram offers a high level, one page summary of the overall process. Subsequent sections go into additional detail on each activity including:

- **Purpose:** The general purpose and intended outcome for this part of the process.
- **Recommendations:** Advice and guidance from subject matter experts aimed at supporting community advocates to lead a successful project.
- **Common Challenges:** Common challenges that can be anticipated during this part of the process and suggestions for overcoming them.
- **Key Partners:** Individuals or organizations that play a role in this part of the process.
- **Resources:** Documentation and information to support a community advocate in successfully completing project activities.

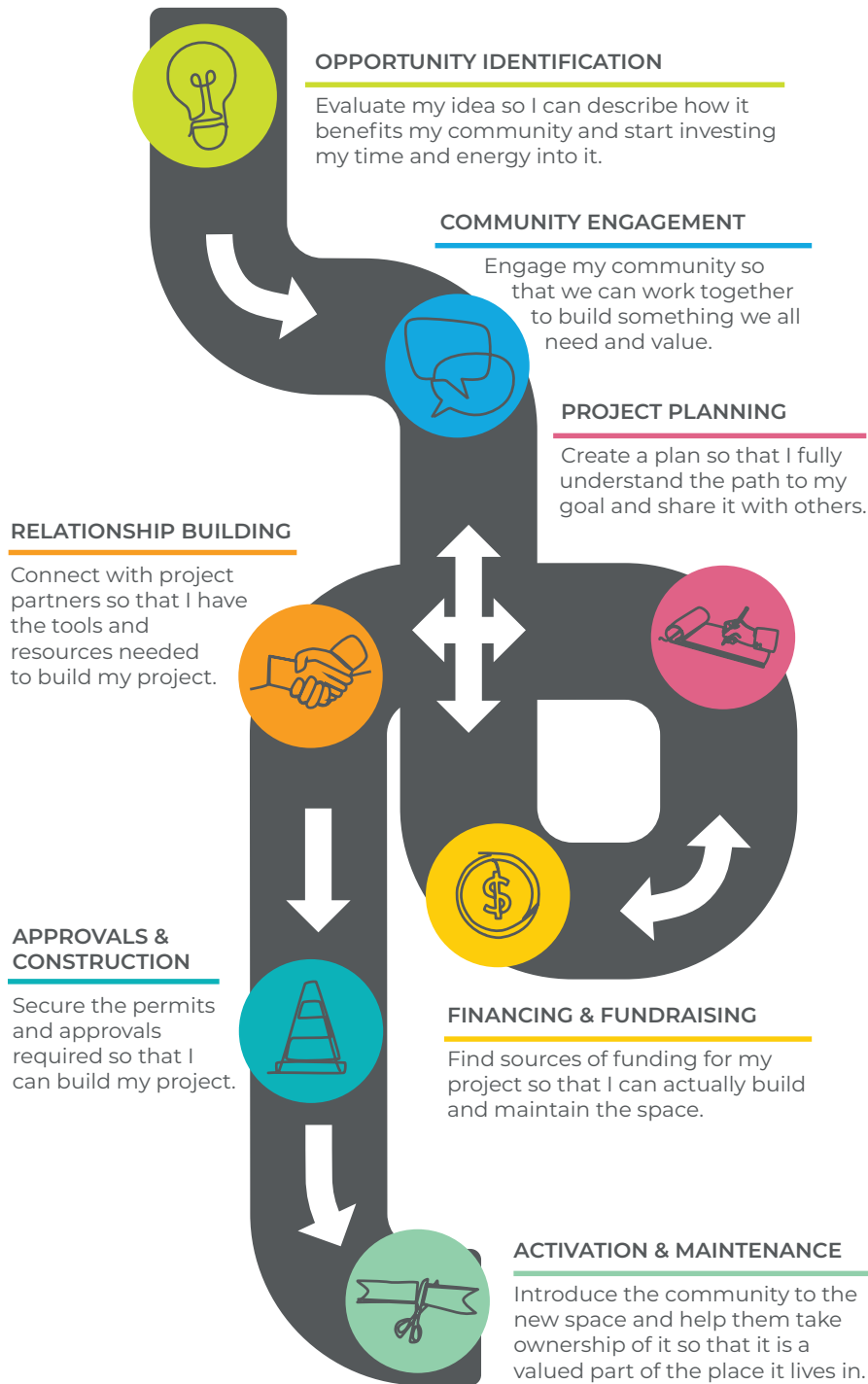
Additional context for some unique types of spaces or projects (e.g., projects involving school boards or homeowners' associations, or urban agriculture or art installation projects) is provided towards the end of the toolkit (Resources for Specific Types of Spaces).

Make sure you also review the Parks Foundation's Community Projects 101. This document is an additional resource that compliments the Community Advocate Tool Kit and serves as a great resource to support any outdoor public space project.



Community Advocate

THE COMMUNITY ADVOCATE JOURNEY



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Define the need for the project within your community.
- Be prepared to take on a long-term volunteer project.
- View the City of Calgary map of existing park spaces.
- Identify community members willing to support the project.
- Spread the word about your project.
- Obtain letters of support and signatures from supporters.
- Define what you want and why, and the partners you need.
- Create design drawings or concept sketches to share your vision.
- Be prepared to adapt your plan with the feedback you receive.
- Connect with your Community Association, Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategist, Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator, and the Parks Foundation.
- Identify a fiscal partner and legal entity to represent the project.
- Determine the funding the City has available and what you'll need to fundraise.
- Partner with a Community Association or a non-profit to access fundraising and grant opportunities.
- Work with your Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategist and Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator to navigate City requirements and processes.
- Finalize the construction plan and schedule, support as necessary.
- Plan an opening event to engage your community members and energize the space.
- Share your story through community newsletters, social media and your partner networks.



OPPORTUNITY IDENTIFICATION

An outdoor public space project begins when an individual sees an opportunity to improve their community by creating or enhancing a community space. This opportunity, big or small, represents an outdoor public space project and the first step an individual takes in their journey as a community advocate! The opportunity is often triggered by:

- **Public Notices:** The City of Calgary, often through community associations, will post public notices either digitally or physically to inform community members about changes coming to community spaces (e.g., life cycling existing outdoor public spaces). These notices typically provide general information about the change and solicit community member feedback on how spaces are currently being used and what value they provide.
- **Direct Experience of Need:** Community members may be familiar with a distinct need their community is experiencing. For example, a member of a recreational group may experience a gap in the availability of outdoor public spaces to support their recreational community (e.g., cricket fields or pump tracks) or may identify existing infrastructure in need of maintenance and repair.



If it takes you 5 years to get to the point where we have your vision, that's OK! It doesn't have to be done in one year, or two years, or whatever.

-Community Advocate

Purpose

The primary purpose of opportunity identification is for the community advocate to consider:

- Whether the project serves an unmet need and provides value for the community.
- Whether they are prepared to commit their own time and effort to leading the project.



Recommendations

Demonstrate the Project Meets a Community Need

A community advocate must be able to demonstrate that there is a need and a desire for the project that is not already being met by other outdoor public spaces and infrastructure.

- Community advocates can explore nearby community spaces physically, or virtually using a tool like Google Maps or the [City of Calgary's Parks Wayfinder Map](#). This exploration will allow the community advocate to articulate how their project meets a need that is currently unmet by the existing public spaces and infrastructure in their community.
- Discussing the project with other community members, the community association or the City via 311 can be an effective way to evaluate whether a project serves an unmet need. Support or validation from other individuals and organizations is a positive sign that the initiative can succeed.

Define the Impacted Community Groups

The community member should begin thinking about how the project will impact the community, and how this impact may be defined relative to:

- Who in the community could benefit from the project (e.g., parents with children will benefit from the construction of a playground); or
- Who in the community could be disrupted by the project (e.g., individuals within 'line of sight' to the project location).

Consider the Level of Commitment

Outdoor public space projects range from small enhancements (e.g., adding a park bench to an existing space) to large construction projects (e.g., building a new playground). Community advocates should reflect on their capacity to manage the project from start to finish.

- Consideration should be given to the scale of the project and the time commitment the community advocate can make as some projects may take considerable time and engagement efforts to implement.

- Outdoor public space projects can require a diverse team and skill set, including project management, grant writing, community engagement, administration, risk and liability management, landscape design and site planning. The community advocate may bring their own skills to the project, but more than likely they will be working with a team to provide the necessary subject matter expertise to see the project through. The community advocate should consider what they are bringing to the project and what they will be looking for in their team.



If you aren't sure that you want to do this for the next three to four years, a real part time job, like 30 hours, then don't do it. Just activate a space that's already there. That's what I would have done. If I can go back in time, I would have, yeah, probably let them take that playground or said yeah, OK, a \$40,000 playground is fine. And then put that effort into starting the events committee that we have now.

-Community Advocate

Make Sure it's a Project not a Service Request

There are several services that the City of Calgary offers for free once they are aware of an issue or a community request. Community advocates can ensure their project is actually a project and not a service request by calling 311 or searching the [311 Online Services Citizen Web Portal](#).

- Services requests may include:
 - Park Lighting: reporting lighting concerns in City parks.
 - Park Structure Repairs: requesting maintenance or repairs to structures within a park.
 - Park Watering Inquires: reporting irrigation issues in a park.

- **Pathway Concerns:** requesting maintenance to address issues such as debris, pathway signs, tree roots, potholes, gravel, etc., on shared pathways or trails.
- **Sidewalk or Curb Repairs:** requesting repairs to public sidewalks, curbs or gutters.
- **Trees:** Requesting any maintenance related to City owned trees.
- **Wheelchair Ramp Request:** requesting new wheelchair ramps.



I mean, those are the people who you have, you know, connections with for the rest of your life, or who have made a difference in your life, right, And left you with good memories, right? That's how communities are built. Always have been. And that's how you know, great things happen.

-Community Advocate

Potential Challenges

During the early stages of a potential project, it's not uncommon for community advocates to have to manage or overcome the following issues:

- **Conflicting Interests:** The community advocate may receive a mix of support and criticism as they begin to discuss the project opportunity. These projects involve public spaces and their impact or value is viewed from a variety of perspectives. Consider incorporating critical feedback into the project as a means to enhance it and help serve a broader segment of the community. If critical feedback or opposition to a project isn't constructive, look to other individuals and organizations from the community for support. Unless the proposed space is unique enough to satisfy a need or desire in the community that is not already being met,

it will be challenging to gain support and funding to get the project off the ground.

- **Volunteer Management:** There are a limited number of volunteers available to support a project within any community, and there are many competing demands for volunteer time. The community advocate may require volunteer support through all phases of the project, but volunteers often come and go as their priorities and obligations change. During Opportunity Identification, community advocates can start planning a volunteer engagement strategy and identifying individuals who are willing to support the project in whatever capacity they can.

Key Partners

- **Community Associations:** The community advocate can reach out to their community association and identify the best point of contact to discuss their project. Community associations may have websites, newsletters, or physical buildings which can provide avenues for making contact and finding the right person to talk to. The City will typically ask for confirmation that the community association is supporting the project.
- **Community Interest Groups:** The outdoor public space project may be of particular interest to a specific group or association within the community (e.g., recreational groups, cultural associations). It can be valuable to identify these groups early on to validate the idea with a group of people who will benefit from it.
- **The Parks Foundation:** The community advocate can contact the Parks Foundation to discuss the project early on and get additional advice on how to best proceed.
- **311:** Calling 311 is an easy way to determine if a project could be a service request. In addition, 311 can be a valuable resource to identify if there are any proposed projects coming to the community that meet the same need as the proposed project.

Resources



[Community Involvement Toolkit](#)

City of Calgary

This website provides information and resources to help community groups better understand and participate in community outreach processes associated with development, land use and planning policy projects happening in our city.



[Current City Led Projects](#)

City of Calgary

A list of planning and development projects occurring throughout the city. This information provides advocates with more context on the larger planning and development initiatives occurring within a community.



[City of Calgary Parks Information, Maps and Programs](#)

City of Calgary

Information and resources regarding the City of Calgary Parks, including maps, programs, space bookings, and general information for Calgary residents.



[City of Calgary Open Space Plan](#)

City of Calgary

The City of Calgary's website describing their plan for open space development and associated resources.



[City of Calgary Parks and Recreation Maps](#)

City of Calgary

The City of Calgary hosts various interactive maps enabling community advocates to look into existing public spaces and put their initiative in the context of the communities they are planning to work in.



[Playground Optimization Considerations](#)

City of Calgary

The City of Calgary has a Playground Optimization Program, this site provides valuable context on the playground life cycling process and approach.



[Inspection and Maintenance Program for Play Spaces](#)

Alberta Health Services

This checklist from AHS provides an unbiased perspective for Community Advocates who want to evaluate the current condition of existing play spaces which may require maintenance.



[Creating Coventry Community-Driven Plan](#)

Creating Coventry

A community-driven initiative providing a road-map toward better park spaces in Coventry Hills. The information available on this partner site can serve as inspiration and guidance for similar future initiatives.



[Calgary Parks with Fitness Equipment](#)

City of Calgary

The City of Calgary provides a list of parks with fitness equipment for community members and advocates interested in seeing where this infrastructure is currently available.



[City of Calgary ELM Program](#)

City of Calgary

Projects focused on enhancing community green spaces may fit within the City of Calgary's Enhanced Landscape Maintenance program.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement begins alongside Opportunity Identification as the community advocate begins to discuss their project with other members of the community. This step provides an opportunity to get a sense of the community's perceptions of the proposed project. Community support for a project is essential because community members can provide (or withhold) volunteer hours, donations, and expressions of support that will be necessary for the success of the project.

Purpose

The primary purpose of community engagement is for the community advocate to:

- Solicit feedback from the community to refine the proposed outdoor public space concept to increase its chances of success.
- Evaluate the level of support the community is willing to provide for the project.

There's value in the community. We don't want to skip this step [engagement] because there could be a relationship that, you know, we didn't know about just from looking at Google Maps.

And then because you've [engaged the community] you have better community buy in and outcomes tend to be better and more people are interested and on and on.

Community Advocate

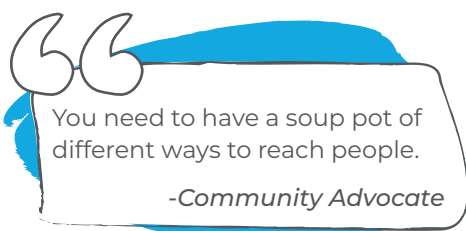


Recommendations

Develop a Project Summary

The advocate should be able to summarize their project with a short description or 'elevator pitch' that will allow them to communicate it more effectively during community engagement. This pitch could include:

- A description of what is being proposed and where will it be.
- A value proposition to define the need or benefit for the community.
- Visuals (e.g., concept diagrams, community maps) to more easily communicate what the project is.



Explore Multiple Engagement Methods

The advocate will need to determine the platforms they will use for engagement. These could be digital, physical, passive, active, in-person or remote. Examples include surveys, petitions, events and meetings, informal conversations, community signage, social media, community town-halls, door knocking or simply showing up in public spaces to meet people. There is no 'best' approach, and the advocate will need to explore multiple engagement methods.

Adopt a Collaborative Mindset

Successful engagement should be authentic and honor the input and time of the people being engaged. Going into community engagement with a collaborative mindset will help set a community advocate up for success. Some tips and tricks to support this approach:

- **Co-Create:** Welcome input, feedback, and

participation from the community members. The people who live, work, and play nearby are local experts with knowledge and ideas that can improve the concept. For instance, someone who lives on a property next to the targeted space may know that the area floods every spring. By opening up the doors to co-creation, a grassroots initiative also opens itself up to relationships and collaborations. A network of partners and collaborators is a huge factor in the success of a community project.

- **Keep Track of Feedback:** Community engagement is hard work. To make sure the effort isn't wasted, community advocates should keep track of their learnings so that they aren't forgotten, and so that they can be shared with the project team as it grows. The efforts made to gather data about what the community's needs and values are should be used to continually inform the project. In addition, letters of support from community groups and members will be valuable later on in the project when applying for grants and demonstrating support exists.
- **Circle Back:** Community engagement should be revisited throughout the planning stages of the project, especially as an initiative gains momentum, becomes better defined, or changes direction. Remember to circle back with the people who have provided input (if they indicated a genuine interest) to keep them engaged and honor their feedback.



Engage Broadly

Keep track of who you are engaging so you can better target the people who you haven't heard from yet. The more broadly your engagement strategy reflects the demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity) and interests (e.g., social connection, physical activity) of your community, the more successful the project will be.

Build a Team

Start recruiting volunteers as early as possible, this will help distribute the effort associated with leading an outdoor public space project. In addition, if a community advocate finds it impossible to recruit volunteers, it is a possible sign that the project will struggle to go further.



Part of the reason why people don't want to do that work is because it exposes the weaknesses in their plans ... If you can stomach that, especially for a project that has some kind of scale or something that's different, then you know you can get a lot of interesting feedback that way.

-Community Advocate

Common Challenges

Common challenges or barriers the community advocate will have to consider and potentially overcome include:

- **Limited Engagement:** Community engagement can indicate whether or not there is a critical mass of support to move the project along. If there isn't a strong enough indication of support for the project, it will likely be a significant challenge to recruit volunteers and fundraise for the project. However, engagement is difficult work and it is not uncommon for advocates to struggle

finding members of their community willing to engage. Some suggestions from previous advocates to support engagement included:

- Use visuals to convey your ideas, a picture is worth a thousand words and being able to show community members what the project is intended to be is much more engaging than simply describing it.
- Go to where impacted community members will be, don't expect the community to come to you, but if you want to draw attention offer free food.
- Vary the days and times of day that you try to engage people; not everyone works on weekdays from 9:00-5:00.
- Find ways to get kids and families involved through clubs, camps and sports.
- Rent and post a temporary community sign
- Use social media to reach out to local community groups.
- Engage local organizations and businesses, share your message in newsletters and on local bulletin boards.
- If you're looking to engage with schools, try reaching out to the principal and/or parent council first.
- **Limited Budget:** Early on in a project there's often little funding to support community engagement activities (e.g., renting signs, hosting events, creating concept diagrams). If there are no financial resources available at this stage, the budget is the total number of hours or dollars that a community advocate has of their own to contribute. Encountering budget limitations can also be a signal that it is time to consider investing time into the Financial Planning and Fundraising stage of the project.

Key Partners

Community Associations: If the community association hasn't already been engaged, they are a key organization to include during the engagement process.

Community Members: Discussing the project with other members of the community (e.g., neighbours, frequent users of existing spaces) is an incredibly valuable part of community engagement.

Community Organizations: The community advocate should think about the organizations within their community that could be engaged (e.g., businesses, school groups, cultural associations, churches, clubs and sports teams).



The best preparation that groups can do is say, hey, we've got this idea. We've vetted it. We've done some door knocking and everyone loves it. And then we're like great, OK that that de-risks that component of it quite substantially.

-City Employee

Resources



Community Outreach Toolkits

The City of Calgary

The City of Calgary provides a Community Outreach Toolkit for anyone interested in or involved in community outreach as part of the planning and developing process. Community Advocates may be interested in reviewing the toolkit to find strategies and tips for how to engage their community in their proposed idea.



Understanding HOAs, RAs and Community Associations

The Calgary Herald

An article from the Calgary Herald discussing the differences between Home Owners' Associations, Residents' Associations and Community Associations which provides community advocates valuable perspective when understanding how the associations within their community are structured to support them.



Advertising on Calgary Public Transit

Calgary Transit

Advertising options are available through Calgary Transit, including Digital and printed ads located inside or outside of vehicles and CTrains, bus benches, and passenger shelter stations. However, this approach is costly and is not likely accessible to the majority of grassroots initiatives.




PROJECT PLANNING

Project planning is critical to the success of an outdoor public space project, but the plan doesn't need to be completed all at once and it isn't written in stone. This step will start as soon as the community advocate begins to describe their project vision, and will be revisited continually as new information, requirements, and partners arise. The plan serves as a record of the community advocate's approach to the project, helps keep things moving forward, and provides a common point of reference to share with partners and collaborators.

Purpose

The primary purpose of project planning is to document and describe:

- Who the project benefits and who needs to be involved.
- What the project is and what it will require to be successful.
- Where the project will or could be built/enhanced/activated.
- When project milestones or key dates are.
- Why the project is important to the advocate and community.
- How the project will be accomplished and funded.



Projects will survive or fail based on preparation. And so in order for key influencers to be involved, or want to get on board, they need, they want to know how successful can the project be, right. And so that's why I had prepared the business plan to be able to bring it to them to say these are the things that we'll be doing, this is the approach we'll be taking and this is who's involved yet right now, right.

Community Advocate

Recommendations

Describe Where the Project Will Be

The project might be intended to be built or activated in a specific location (e.g., a vacant lot) but the advocate should also consider characteristics of the proposed space (e.g., necessary square footage, proximity to existing amenities, land use qualifications). It can be valuable to adopt a flexible approach when it comes to a project's location to open up new opportunities and respond to potential project constraints.

Describe the Project Beneficiaries and Partners

Document who the proposed space will benefit, the demographics and characteristics of the people using it and their needs and values. By considering characteristics of the people who will enjoy this space, the team can better design a space that will benefit all potential community members. In addition to who the project helps, start thinking about who will help the project. Create a list of the people, roles and skill sets that will be important to the project.

Describe The Project and its Requirements

Document what is actually being proposed and what the project's goal is. By writing down the end goal in a concrete and descriptive manner, the community advocate can share their vision with others and ensure that everyone is "on the same page". This description should also include requirements for the project to be successful (e.g., permits, funding).

Describe the Importance of the Project

The community advocate should define why the project is important to the community it will benefit. This benefit can be iterated and enhanced community engagement may identify additional benefits or stories of potential impact. The advocate may also want to include tangible reasons why they are passionate about the project to serve as a set of core values; this can be used to evaluate the impact of potential changes or modifications to the plan.

Describe the Timelines

Community projects can take a few months or a few years. The timeline will be dependent on the project, but it is worth considering important milestones (e.g., permit applications and City approvals, grant application deadlines) and the impact timelines could have on a project. For example, a longer project might have more turnover in the volunteer committee but also provide more time for fundraising. In addition, the community advocate may want to consider if they are willing to commit the time to a project that will span multiple years. A project will more often than not experience delays and it is worth adding contingencies to project timelines to account for this.



Think about your project from a 360 perspective, you break it down into elements and you understand what elements do you need for financial support? What elements do you have for in kind support? What elements do you need for volunteer support? And then start identifying those out within the community...

-Community Advocate

Plan to be Adaptable

The project plan doesn't need to be built all at once, the community advocate should start by documenting the detail and information currently available at the start of the project, and allow the plan to evolve and grow over time. New project partners and new project requirements will provide opportunities to build out a plan in more detail as the project progresses; if at some point the plan is missing something critical to proceed, that represents an opportunity to enhance it.



If an organization goes under, if they can't pay, they can't fund to operate that rink anymore - because it costs a lot of money to have these things - we get it back. The City of Calgary gets it back. And it would come into our inventory and frankly, we don't want it.

-City Employee

excel at things like formalizing project plan documents or writing grant applications.

- Partner Liaison: Having one point of contact for communications with partners (i.e., Parks Foundation, the City of Calgary) helps to clarify who is responsible for replying to any emails or requests for information. Often this role is filled by the project lead.



You have to keep pushing until you get where you're going.

-Community Advocate

Consider Key Roles

Even if the community advocate is capable of volunteering full time hours to their initiative, one person isn't enough. There are many different aspects of managing the project, and each is well-suited to people with certain strengths and personality types. Some of the different roles, and personality types to fit them, include:

- **Project Lead:** Having one or two individuals who have the authority to make decisions and resolve disputes is effective for moving a project forward. These people are comfortable taking responsibility, making decisions, and leading group discussions.
- **Community Engagement Lead:** Some people, particularly extroverts, excel at being out in the community, initiating conversations with strangers to gain feedback. The ability to empathize and listen is key.
- **Logistics:** Some people don't like going out and talking to strangers but are perfectly happy to track things in spreadsheets. They can track things like grant application deadlines, budgets, or ordering supplies. They can also keep a record of community feedback and engagement activities.
- **Writers:** Some people enjoy writing, and

Common Challenges

- **Hearing No:** As the community advocate progresses the plan, they may receive feedback that certain aspects of the plan are not possible or unlikely to be approved. This feedback can be based on actual legal or liability considerations, but it can also be opinion based. What's important for any advocate is to learn to handle and adapt their plan in response to hearing No. Once the reason behind a No is understood, it's often possible for an advocate to adapt the plan to achieve the same or a similar result. Maintenance and Optional Amenities Agreements may be required to allow non-standard installations.
- **Project Governance:** Community led projects don't have a standardized governance structure. The individuals involved and their roles and responsibilities are compiled by the advocate on an ad hoc basis, and there is no true 'accountability' structure. That said, every project is built around a team of individuals and organizations that have a proposed role. Coordinating a project that involves a large number of volunteers, non-profit organizations, and municipal departments

is no small undertaking. It can be helpful to create a document that formalizes the roles and responsibilities within a volunteer group to help create a communal sense of ownership over the initiative. It also helps to predict and mitigate any challenges that may come up with volunteers who have other demands on their time and may be unable to commit to certain roles or responsibilities.

- **Legal Partnership Requirements:** Most outdoor public space projects will require partnership with a legal entity, that is able to represent the project's interests on formal agreements (e.g., License of Occupations with the City of Calgary), manage project finances (e.g., provide accounts to hold fund-raising dollars) and manage liability (e.g., provide insurance for events and volunteers). The City's intended partner in this regard is the Community Association. In some instances, the association is unwilling or unable to support the project, which can become a significant challenge for the project and the advocate. The path forward will either require convincing the community association (e.g., demonstrating strong community support, reducing the financial or administrative ask to the association), or identifying alternate partners (e.g., other societies or non-profits, Parks Foundation)



And the other last point I'll make is have everyone sign a project charter, the key people involved, get them to sign a project charter so everyone fully understands and they've committed to their roles and responsibilities.

-Community Advocate

Key Partners

Project Planning will involve multiple partners, from volunteers supporting the project to City Employees involved in approvals and permitting. Which partners are the most important to the project will depend on the phase the project is in. The following table describes a series of project activities the community advocate should plan for, along with potential partners that may support that activity. Different projects may vary in terms of what activities are required and the sequence they need to be completed in, but this list can be considered a reasonable starting point to get a sense of the work that will be needed for a outdoor public space project and the partners that could support.

Key Partners

ACTIVITY	PARTNERS TO CONSIDER
<p>Assemble a team: Recruit volunteers and make connections with key partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Community Association (or Residents' Association) can connect you with like-minded people in your community. • Local interest groups
<p>Create a project charter: Document roles and responsibilities for the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the newly formed team of community volunteers
<p>Partner with a legal entity: Identify the legal entity (Community Association, non-profit or society) to act as the legal entity representing the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community or Home Owners' Association • Local charities or societies • Parent Council (if project is on school property)
<p>Create a project budget: Link project requirements to costs, some may be covered in-kind whereas others will require actual dollars.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Calgary Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategist
<p>Fundraise: Identify potential funding sources and create a plan to pursue them (see Financing and Fundraising Section).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal entity partner • Parks Foundation • Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator • Volunteers
<p>Design the space: Work with a landscape architect and/or potential vendors to design the proposed space.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape architects • Equipment vendors • Construction contractors • Parks Foundation (including financial support through the Stella Conceptual Drawing Grant)
<p>Demonstrate support: Obtain letters of support and a sight line survey to demonstrate the project has buy-in from the community and key partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal entity partner • Community Association • Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategist
<p>Obtain proof of insurance: Collaborate with the legal entity partner to address any insurance requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal entity partner
<p>Create a land lease agreement: If necessary, work with the NPC and legal entity partner for any lease or license of occupation agreements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator

ACTIVITY	PARTNERS TO CONSIDER
<p>Request for Proposals (RFPs): Get estimates for the work and or equipment needed. It may be necessary to issue a RFP to potential contractors and vendors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community volunteers • Parks Foundation
<p>Permits and Approvals: On an as needed basis, complete the requirements for any necessary permits and approvals including Historical Resource Assessment (HRA), Drawing review, Building Permits (BP), Environmental Review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator • City of Calgary Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategist • Landscape Architect
<p>Finalize construction and schedule: Once the project is approved and vendors have been selected, construction can begin.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator • Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategist • Landscape Architect
<p>Activate the space: Consider hosting an event to welcome the community to the new space. Share stories with the community about the project's success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community volunteers • Legal entity partner
<p>Maintain the space: Any ongoing maintenance that is required, which is not managed by the City, will need to be coordinated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community volunteers

Resources



Community Projects 101 *Parks Foundation*

A guide for community led projects in Calgary, including Visioning and Engagement, Planning and Partnerships, Funding, Building, and a compilation of toolkits and resources. This is a fundamental resource for community advocates.



Community Profiles *City of Calgary*

The City of Calgary provides this resource that provides valuable information pertaining to community demographics.



Community Playground Workbook *City of Calgary*

The City of Calgary provides this resource to guide community advocates through the process of developing or enhancing a community playground, including resources and checklists.



Inspiring Neighbourhoods Grant Tip Sheet *City of Calgary*

The City of Calgary provides this resource in relation to the Inspiring Neighbourhoods Grant. However, it discusses factors to incorporate into the planning for outdoor public space projects generally.



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Developing Project relationships is an ongoing activity that is critical to any successful outdoor public space project. When and how a community advocate engages specific individuals or organizations is largely in response to identifying the need to do so, but often a project need or requirement is identified that is outside the scope or capability of the community advocate, which triggers the need to broaden their team. There are multiple parties and partners that will be involved in bringing an outdoor public space project to life. Many of these are listed in Calgary's Outdoor Public Spaces, and are elaborated on in more detail here.

Purpose

The primary purpose of developing project relationships is to:

- Identify and make connections with individuals and organizations who will provide support for the project (e.g., through volunteers, resources, legal agency, or networks).
- Share the impact and story of the project with a broader group of individuals and organizations.

Before approaching any potential partner, know why they would say yes or no and have your information ready and available for them... if you get them early on and you show how organized you are and you show them why it's going to be valuable to them. I've done sponsorship for probably 20 years or more and you know when you show them why and you help them understand the value. It's been very rare that someone has not become involved on some level.



Recommendations

- **Research Potential Partners Ahead of Time:** By researching the organizations and individuals that could be involved in a project, a community advocate will be better positioned to develop a relationship with them based on their mandate and capabilities. Before reaching out to a potential project partner, it is worth taking the time to understand what their role or level of support could be in the project so there is a clear ask that is well aligned with the partner's interests.
- **Consider a Variety of Partners and Purposes:** Local businesses, church groups, schools, and other interest groups or organizations can be valuable partners to grassroots organizations. Apart from asking for financial support, advocates should consider other means of support including in-kind donations or mutually beneficial exchanges. For instance, weeding or gardening activities can offer a learning opportunity for local students, and provide extra sets of hands for a community garden initiative. Local colleges or schools that teach carpentry or other small construction activities can also lend creative solutions to a project.



We looked at doing the nonprofit thing and I think it was \$3,000 or so just to kind of register it, and then you have to have audited financials every year... and we were like, this sounds like a lot of work. And if we put the work into becoming a charity or nonprofit, all of our effort would be towards the red tape aspect of that... I don't think that we would have any ambition left over.

-Community Advocate

Common Challenges

- **Distributed Roles:** There are many affected parties who will need to be involved in the process, including those involved in various City of Calgary departments (e.g., Parks & Open Spaces, Partnerships, Mobility, Utilities Delivery, Climate and Environment, Real Estate & Development Services), local property owners, construction and design contractors, insurance providers, local community or interest groups, and financiers. Each party will have their own needs, goals, and requirements, and may present obstacles to a project.
- **Catch 22s:** It's not uncommon for a partner organization to get involved at a certain 'stage' of a project or once a threshold for project maturity has been demonstrated, while simultaneously being seen as necessary to move the project along. This is often seen as a Catch 22, where the partnership or activity required at a specific stage of a project requires that stage to be completed prior to getting involved.
- **Community Association Capacity:** Community Associations vary in their capacity to support projects, both financially and in the availability of volunteers. In addition, some newer communities have not yet formed Community Associations, or have a Homeowners' Association instead. If a community advocate is planning a project in an area where the Community Association isn't well positioned to assist the project, it may be necessary to partner with a different not-for-profit, charity, or society. For a list of Calgary organizations and societies to explore, see pages 23-25 of the "[Breaking Ground Calgary Toolkit](#)".

Key Partners

- **Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinators (NPCs):** NPCs are City staff dedicated to supporting community associations and social recreation groups to improve neighbourhoods. In most instances, the NPC will work with the community advocate through their community association to navigate City requirements and processes.
- **Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategists:** Community Strategists are City Staff who advocate for people who want to improve and connect with outdoor public spaces. They act as a portal into the City's processes, and act as a communicator and facilitator between different City departments. Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategists are essential for helping assess the feasibility of a project and can set expectations around what is feasible.
- **Community Associations:** Community associations can be found in nearly every neighbourhood in Calgary. They are volunteer run and have a general mission to provide programs and services for the community, and act as a central point for communication between the City and community members. They are legal entities, and the City of Calgary's preferred partner organization for grassroots organizations. Community Associations can:
 - Access specific municipal communication channels.
 - Provide access to funding sources that are exclusive to not-for-profit organizations such as casino fundraising through AGLC, and grant applications that require the applicant to be a registered legal entity.
 - Provide insurance for project builds and activation activities.
 - Hold a Land Lease or License of Occupation.
- **Parks Foundation:** Parks Foundation is non-profit organization, and qualified donee, that collaborates with community groups, school groups, and sport organizations to support the

development and enhancement of outdoor public spaces. Their support is free with a Parks Foundation account and is provided through:

- Accounting services, including accepting donations on behalf of the community project and issuing tax receipts for eligible donations.
- Networking with other project partners and knowledge of funding opportunities.
- Offering a variety of grant programs, including:
 - Stella Conceptual Drawing Grant Program, providing seed money to hire a landscape architect to develop a concept drawing for the project,
 - Amateur Sport Grant Program,
 - Building Communities Grant.
- Free fundraising support via a Parks Foundation project account.

Parks foundation also offers varying levels of project management support for specific projects, ranging from offering advice when community advocates run into issues, to taking on full project management responsibility and accountability for a 5% fee.



It's a lot of different pieces, but you need all of them to make it work. And we're not all good at all of those pieces... You can't rely on just one person to make things happen.

-Community Advocate

Resources



The Federation of Calgary Communities

The Federation of Calgary Communities is the largest volunteer movement in the city, working to support board members and volunteers who help improve neighborhood life. They provide support and resources in volunteer engagement, community building, governance, political advocacy, fund development, and financial literacy to members.



The Parks Foundation

A first point of contact for assessing the feasibility of a project and subsequently liaising with City departments to make sure requirements are met.



City Councilors of Calgary Wards

The City of Calgary is currently (as of 2023) divided into 14 Wards, each with a Ward Councilor who represents the interests of the residents within their ward. City Council sets policy direction which creates an overarching landscape in which the development of public park spaces occurs, however individual Councilors are not responsible for approving or directing individual projects.



Calgary Parks & Open Spaces

Call 311 or use the 311 App and request to speak to a Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategist

Calgary Parks & Open Spaces has a Community Strategist staff member for every Ward in the city. Reach out to the Strategist responsible for your ward.



Community Social Workers

The City of Calgary has Community Social Workers in over 20 neighbourhoods to support residents in finding neighbourhood-based solutions to social issues. They prioritize working with community members who have experienced social and/or economic marginalization.



Neighborhood Partnership Coordinator (NPC)

NPCs support community associations and social recreation groups in areas of lease and license of occupation, organizational development, financial management, facility maintenance and capital construction support, connecting city resources, supporting engagement activities, including guidance in the provision of programs and services.



IntegralOrg

IntegralOrg offers education and support to Alberta nonprofits in governance, strategic planning, legal services, risk management, and more.



Permaculture Calgary Guild

Permaculture Calgary Guild empowers Calgarians to create positive change and resilience in their lives and communities through fostering connections and collaborations, facilitating educational opportunities, innovation, and skill share; and permaculture action, advocacy, and outreach.



City of Calgary 311 Services

311 is a free service provided to the public to access city information and non-emergency related services, including standard requests for repairs and improvements of public areas.



Community Developers

Refer to the Community or Home Owners' association to find the best contact for the community developer

For public space projects in newer or under development communities, the developer who created the community is also a good ally and will often support initiatives to promote healthy and active communities.



FINANCING AND FUNDRAISING

Financing and fundraising is often required in order to cover the costs of developing or activating an outdoor public space. This part of the process typically requires that the community advocate has a general understanding of what the project budget is, as developed through project planning. In addition, financing and fundraising is easier once a relationship has been established with a non-profit partner (e.g., a community association) willing to act as a fiscal agent; this will support the management of the funds being raised and open up more opportunities to grants and fundraising opportunities.

Purpose

The primary purpose of financing and fundraising is to:

- Finance the project so that it can be successfully executed.

Recommendations

- **Getting Started:** The community advocate will need to know what their fundraising target is to develop a financing and fundraising strategy. A valuable first step is to ballpark how much the project will cost. This can be supported by looking up vendor pricing lists, getting quotes from landscape architects or playground equipment suppliers, and talking to organizations and individuals who have experience with similar projects. Ensure the plan includes costs associated with construction, activation and ongoing maintenance when applicable. Having a clear fundraising target coupled with a good description of the project (supported by visuals) will make the fundraising process more effective.

Like 80% of the budget or 70% of the budget came from grants from the government of Alberta, the City of Calgary or private organizations... CFEP was the big one. They're a matching grant. So, we applied for them very last. We had like \$116,000 or \$118,000 and then we applied for them and they matched it!

Community Advocate



- **Explore Replacement Costs:** If the outdoor public space project is going to involve replacing infrastructure that is at the end of its life and needs to be replaced, the City of Calgary may provide cash and in-kind resources. This is a potential source of project funding that could offset what is required for additional fundraising efforts.
- **Create a Financial Plan:** The money raised needs to account for all project costs. For some projects, the team will also need to include utility costs (e.g., irrigation or electricity) or budget contingency for potential escalation in construction costs. The Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategist will be able to advise on these requirements.
- **Explore Multiple Options:** There are multiple approaches to fundraising, and all of them should be explored to find the best fit for the project and the team. This includes submitting grant applications, soliciting corporate or private donations, working through Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis (AGLC) for charitable gaming activities, and organizing bottle drives or community-based fundraising.

as materials, food, volunteers, and services). Consider the following organization's ability and interest in supporting the project:

- Schools can provide in-kind support through student opportunities and access to an engaged volunteer base.
- Local businesses are often willing to provide in-kind support for a project in exchange for business exposure and opportunities to give back to their community.
- Local religious or Scouts organizations are often committed to acts of community service and are well organized to organize volunteer opportunities.
- Local photographers, videographers and artists may be willing to support activating spaces and sharing stories back to the broader community.



- **Consider In-Kind Contributions:** Not every potential organization interested in supporting the project will be able to offer cash, but they may be able to offer in-kind donations (such

Common Challenges

- **Limited Fundraising Success:** Community advocates may find it difficult to raise the funds that their project requires. This could be due to limited community engagement, low success rates on grant applications, or the inability to pursue funding opportunities without the right project partners. There can also be competition between community initiatives for finite resources. This is not at all uncommon challenge and one of the only ways to overcome it is persistence and continued commitment to the project. This may involve altering project timelines to allow more time to find the right partners and right funding opportunities.
- **External Financial Realities:** The availability of funds and donations for an outdoor public space project can be influenced by factors completely out of the community advocate's control. Things like global pandemics, inflation, trade agreements, or interest rates, to name a few, are all external factors which can contribute to limited fundraising success. In addition, community demographics play a role in how successful local fundraising can be.

Key Partners

- **Community Associations:** Partnering with a community association (or other non-profit organization) to act as a fiscal agent for the project opens up additional fundraising opportunities and is one of the most effective ways to increase fundraising potential.
- **Volunteer Groups:** Fundraising can be laborious and time consuming; having a strong volunteer base will help alleviate some of this effort from the community advocate. Consider engaging the local community groups that will benefit from the space to support volunteer efforts.
- **Parks Foundation:** Partnering with the Parks Foundation can improve fundraising success by providing grants, contacts and knowledge of fundraising opportunities, and general fundraising support.



The City of Calgary has things that are within their desired specification, so they're gonna have items that they support and their parks teams will maintain and everything is as they would like. If you choose to put in an amenity outside of the City specification, this could be like a decorative piece of stone as a nice entrance into your park, or this could be an amenity like a fire pit, or a gathering space. This could be a bench that is more artistic than a standard park bench. These are things and examples of optional amenities, and when you put those in your detailed design, the city forces you into an optional amenity agreement.

-Developer

Resources



[AGLC Charitable Gaming Information](#)

This site provides more information about how the AGLC supports charitable gaming in Alberta. Community advocates interested in exploring this opportunity (e.g., Casino fundraisers) should review this information.



[Federation of Calgary Communities ActivateYYC](#)

ActivateYYC is micro grant program to fund initiatives aimed at transforming spaces to promote movement, safety, and neighbourliness.



[City of Calgary Inspiring Neighbourhoods Grant](#)

The ING grant is designed to fill gaps in funding for community associations to advance the building of great communities across Calgary.



City of Calgary Public Art Microgrants

This program provides microgrants for community members to develop or install ideas for community-run public art projects.



Parks Foundation Amateur Sport Grant

The program supports capital projects that provide significant benefit to the continuation and enrichment of sport. Eligible organizations, based in Calgary, can apply for grants for new sports facilities, expanding or improving existing facilities, or purchasing sport equipment.



Parks Foundation Building Communities Grant

The Building Communities program supports a variety of community-led park or playground initiatives by awarding grants of up to \$30,000.



Parks Foundation Stella Conceptual Drawing Grants

The Stella Conceptual Drawing Grants program is intended to provide seed money for the development of a concept to re-envision Calgary's parks, pathways and natural areas.



Alberta Blue Cross Built Together Program Grants

Grants to help Albertans build spaces for active living in their community.



Alberta Recreation and Parks Association Grants

A list of external funding opportunities from government, corporations and not-for-profit organizations specific for the recreation and parks sector, compiled by ARPA.



Government of Alberta Community Facility Enhancement Program (CFEP)

Community Facility Enhancement Program (CFEP) funding matching funding to acquire, build, purchase, repair, renovate, upgrade or expand sports, recreational, cultural or other related public-use community facilities.



Government of Alberta Community Initiatives Program (CIP)

Community Initiatives Program (CIP) provides funding support to support organizations that contribute to their communities and create opportunities for Albertans to engage with their communities.



Calgary Foundation

The Calgary Foundation offers various grants of different sizes for projects.



Co-Op Community Spaces Funding

The Co-op Community Spaces Program was established to improve community health and well-being by building places for Western Canadians to come together, build social connections and enable community development in communities with a local Co-Op.



Canadian Tire Community Development Grants

Operational support and programming support grants available.



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation Grant

Eligible projects include schoolyard greening, park revitalization, community gardens, park programming and citizen science initiatives.



APPROVALS AND CONSTRUCTION

Prior to being able to build or modify an outdoor public space, the community advocate will need to obtain the relevant approvals and permits. This part of the process typically requires the project to have the necessary funding (i.e., Financing and Fundraising is complete), a clearly articulated plan (i.e., Project Planning is detailed enough to apply for approvals), and the necessary partnerships are established (i.e., Community Engagement and Relationship Building have led to demonstrable project support).

Purpose

The primary purpose of the approvals and construction phase is to:

- Meet The City's requirements so that the construction of the outdoor public space can begin.
- Build (or enhance) the outdoor public space.

Be prepared in advance and anticipate all the roadblocks you're going to have for everything before you start your project. And then what happens is you get people to sign their commitment before you start everything. And then when you have someone starting to give you a roadblock, and I can give you several instances where the roadblock came up and I said, well, actually here's the letter, so we're allowed to do this, but these reasons and sorry, I appreciate what you're saying, but we already got that covered and thanks for raising it, but it's already covered. This risk is taken care of and we are in fact allowed to do it. I cannot, I cannot tell you how many times. Because it was done in advance that that roadblock became a nonissue.



Recommendations

- **Finalize the Design of the Space:** Engage the community, incorporate feedback, and finalize the design based on the amount of in-kind and financial support raised. Landscape architects are a great resource for design input and validation, landscape drawing and specification preparation, and generally have a wealth of knowledge around City processes and best practices.
- **Maintain Good Relationships:** The approvals and construction process is easier when it's viewed as a team effort. It's important for community advocates to maintain good relationships with all the project

partners and approvers involved to keep the project moving forward. As with any team effort, relationships will stay healthy and productive if communication is constructive and expectations are clearly articulated. Remember, everyone involved shares the common goal of enhancing park spaces, but this goal is viewed from different perspectives.

- **Document Proof of Support:** Most approvals processes will require the community advocate and team to obtain proof of support through letters of support and/or sight line surveys. Some grants will require a sight line survey be completed prior to applying for funding and letters of support can substantially increase chances of success.

“

They did end up letting us do everything that we wanted to do in the end, but we definitely had to really, really stand up to a lot of organizations, and really be firm about what we wanted. But it would have been a lot easier to just kind of go with the flow.

-Community Advocate

- **Typical Approvals and Requirements:** With the help of partners such as Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinators and Community Strategists, the community advocate will through the necessary approvals and processes. These vary depending on the nature of the project but generally include the following:
 - Obtaining proof of insurance.
 - City approval of construction drawings.
 - Completing necessary permits and reviews.
 - Creating lease, license of occupation or optional amenities agreements.

- Completing a request for proposals process and obtaining quotes from eligible contractors/vendors.
- Finalizing a construction plan and schedule.

“

So once we had all of our money in place, then the landscape architects helped us choose contractors and the City of Calgary did the same thing. They require you to interview three contractors and then to choose one. And they have an approved list of contractors, so you can only reach out to their people that are on the list.

-Community Advocate

Common Challenges

- **Navigating Complex Processes:** The approvals and construction process can be time consuming and involve a significant amount of document review and completion. Contracts and permitting requirements are often written in 'legalese' which can make it challenging to understand what is expected of a community advocate. This challenge may require partnerships with individuals familiar with or responsible for the process, and the key strategy is patience and a willingness to collaborate.
- **Risk and Liability Management:** One of the most common challenges expressed by community advocates is reconciling their vision for the project with the City's requirements related to the management of risk and liability. In addition to risks associated with physical harm to users of an outdoor public space, the financial liability associated with maintaining the space is often identified as a barrier to innovative outdoor space design. As described earlier in Project Planning, knowing how to respond to "Hearing No" is an important skill for a community advocate.

Consider how the plan can be modified to manage concerns that are raised and explore the root cause of the “No” in order to address it with constructive creativity.

Key Partners

- **Parks & Open Spaces Community Strategists:** Community Strategists have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can aid a community advocate in navigating the approvals and construction process.
- **Community Associations:** The community associations may have completed similar outdoor public space projects in the past. The community advocate may be able to work with the individuals at the association who have subject matter expertise based on previous experience.
- **Parks Foundation:** Partners at Parks Foundation are familiar with a wide range of outdoor public space projects and can provide valuable guidance on how to best work through the approvals and construction processes.
- **Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinators:** NPCs are essential partners when navigating City requirements and processes.

Resources



[Lease or License of Occupation](#)
City of Calgary

City of Calgary website for organizations currently or seeking to hold a lease or license of occupation agreement with the City of Calgary



[Partner Project Guide](#)
(Request this document through the NPC)
City of Calgary

City of Calgary process diagram to develop, renovate or update a public amenity.



[Request for Land Form](#)
(Request this document through the NPC)
City of Calgary

City of Calgary form for an association to request land for a project. Checklist and context on what is required.



[Sightline Survey](#)
(Request this document through the NPC)
City of Calgary

City of Calgary form to document the approval / disapproval of individuals within line of sight of the project.



[Sample RFP/Procurement Guide](#)
City of Calgary

City of Calgary resources for preparing construction procurement documents



[Park Development Guidelines \(for Developers\)](#)
City of Calgary

Guidelines and specifications primarily for developers, including landscape construction, native plants list, and optional amenities (section 7.9 of Development Guidelines and Standard Specifications for Landscape Construction)



[Development Guidelines and Standard Specifications: Landscape Construction](#)
City of Calgary

City guidelines for the construction of landscape elements.



We're really, really stuck on do you have enough money to operate it after because it's always, you can always find the money to run it or to build it... But we want to know, from a risk perspective that you are able to operate it long-term.

-City Employee



ACTIVATION AND MAINTENANCE

Activation and Maintenance represent two ongoing activities that begin once an outdoor public space project reaches completion. Activation represents an opportunity to share the project team's success with the community and to introduce community members to the new (or enhanced) space they can now enjoy. For outdoor public space projects involving infrastructure, ongoing maintenance is often required, specific requirements may have been specified in maintenance plans developed during Project Planning or Approvals and Construction.

Purpose

The primary purpose of activation and maintenance is to:

- Ensure the space is kept in good repair and condition for the safety and enjoyment of the community members who use it.
- Introduce the community to the new or revitalized space so that they feel a sense of ownership and inclusion with it.

Recommendations

- **Plan an Activation Event:** Activation is the process of welcoming people to experience and take ownership of an outdoor public space. An ideal activation process evolves through stages of initial awareness, engagement with the space, developing a sense of ownership, and ultimately caring for the space. For a community that has been engaged throughout the process of building and/or enhancing a local park space, the project's completion should be cause for great excitement. An event to welcome the community into the new space is a great opportunity to share the success, connect with wider members of the community, and demonstrate the benefits of the space's amenities and features.

I would love to have like a parade of garage sales. That was something always brought up, or block parties or things like that. But we just don't do that anymore... you have to get a special permit from city of Calgary... you have to have fire escape routes, and people with first aid training and there's a lot of red tape to doing a lot of these local events that should just be fun. But there's a lot of liability nowadays and things like that that stop a lot of really activated people from taking that into their community.



- **Activation is Ongoing:** Ongoing activation activities help to preserve the excitement around a space and invite new users to enjoy it. Depending on the park space, activation activities may take many different forms, including:
 - Sports tournaments,
 - Yoga or meditation classes,
 - Planting or harvesting activities or events,
 - Book exchanges,
 - Facilitated children's play activities,
 - Music or other performances,
 - Pancake breakfasts,
- **Maintenance Can Bring Community Together:** Requirements to maintain an outdoor public space can provide opportunities for social connection and help bring community together. If certain community groups were unable to engage in earlier phases of the project, consider circling back with them to see if they would be interested in supporting ongoing space maintenance. Having ownership over a piece of public space, whether through a stroke of a paintbrush or watering a garden patch, allows community members to feel a sense of pride in the space, and can help decrease the likelihood of vandalism.



Advertising is one of the biggest challenges. SO hard to get the word out for cheap anywhere other than Facebook. Even Calgary public libraries won't let us post events anymore. Schools are unable to as well. All information must be vetted through their organizations, so they will only advertise events happening by reputable companies or the City.

-Community Advocate

Common Challenges

- **Limited Activation Funding:** Activation events are often difficult to find funding for, often because they aren't eligible project costs for many grants or funds. Beyond lowering the cost of proposed activation activities, consider working with the Community Association. They can be great allies in planning for ongoing activation activities and have a mandate to provide programming, communications, and engagement for the surrounding community.



Leave about 15% extra in the budget for contingencies... if there was a piece of wood that no one recognized was on its way to getting rotted but a year later rotted, you know, having something in the budget to pick up those loose ends.

-Community Advocate

- **Limited Maintenance Support:** Volunteer turnover and challenges in succession planning within community associations often result in fewer individuals available to support maintenance activities. It's not uncommon for maintenance work to end up depending on grassroots organizations and volunteers. When this happens, it is often necessary to circle back to the community engagement phase of a project, this time with a focus on keeping the outdoor space in good repair as opposed to building it.
- **Liability:** Any public event brings with it the potential risk that someone attending the event experiences harm or damages property. The organizers of the event typically bear the burden of that liability, which can at times seem overwhelming. Community advocates should consider partnerships with community groups that have experience managing event

liability (e.g., the community association) to avoid navigating the necessary insurance processes on their own.

Key Partners

- **Volunteers:** Activation and maintenance activities typically depend on engaged and motivated volunteer groups. Even if there are already volunteers attached to the project based on previous engagement activities, there may be value in ongoing volunteer engagement to handle turnover and succession planning.
- **Community Associations:** Community associations can be great partners in promoting activation and maintenance activities within the community as well as finding and coordinating volunteer opportunities.



We had planned to have a book swap [when the fence came down], and construction just ran over [the original completion date]. So, we held it outside of the fence and it was snowy and miserable and so many people came. Like hundreds of people. It was amazing.

-Community Advocate

Resources



Resources for Activating Parks

Park People

Park People is an organization committed to supporting community groups activate the power of parks. Their website provides a series of information resources to support community members to activate park spaces.



How to Plan an Event

Jennifer Bridges

This article from Jennifer Bridges can serve as a general guide for community advocates unfamiliar with the event planning process.



311 Online Services

The City of Calgary

Community advocates should explore City services through 311 to identify potential resources and supports for activation and maintenance activities, including:

- **Park Play Bins:** Parks PlayBins are treasure chests filled with games, recreation equipment, fun activities and so much more. All citizens have to do is create a Service Request to Unlock the PlayBin and discover the treasures within! You must be 12 years or older to book a PlayBin. Available through the City's 311 Online Services Portal (works best in Google Chrome and MS Edge).



TD Friends of the Environment grant

TD Bank

TD offers a grant which will cover park programming activities. Community advocates should investigate the grant as a means to cover activation and maintenance activities that have an environmental component.



City of Calgary Event Bookings

The City of Calgary

This City of Calgary web page allows the user to book outdoor public spaces for events and provides information on when permits are required.



I incorporated a sustainability element of eight years into the project plan, the business plan. I identified a group to ask them if they would be responsible for maintaining the project over this time frame and got agreement on that and then had a budget for that.

-Community Advocate

RESOURCES FOR SPECIFIC TYPES OF SPACES

The following tables provide links to resources that can be useful for outdoor public space projects involving community gardens and urban agriculture, playgrounds, school boards, or art projects.

Community Gardens and Urban Farming

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
Community Gardens Handbook <i>Alberta Health Services</i>	A checklist of requirements for starting a community garden, following a location approval from the Calgary Parks & Open Spaces.
Steps to Start a Community Garden <i>Calgary Horticultural Society</i>	Steps to start a community garden, complete with links to additional resources. Compiled by the Calgary Horticulture Society.
Breaking Ground Toolkit <i>Evergreen</i>	The resources in this toolkit are intended to assist individuals, community members, planners and designers in realizing the goal of a greener and more sustainable city.
Community Gardens Checklist <i>Calgary Horticultural Society</i>	A checklist of requirements for starting a community garden, following a location approval from the Calgary Parks & Open Spaces.
Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs <i>Silver Springs Community Group</i>	A community-driven initiative providing an example of the creation of a community gathering space, destination park and botanical gardens featuring plants that grow in Calgary's climate.
Land of Dreams Urban Farming <i>Calgary Catholic Immigration Society</i>	Land of Dreams is an urban farming initiative which brings community, social connection and food, together in one exciting initiative. The project is in partnership with recently arrived immigrants and refugees.
How to Farm a Vacant Urban Lot <i>Agrarians Foundation</i>	A step-by-step guide by Young Agrarians, a program of Agrarians Foundation.
Highfield Regenerative Farm <i>Highfield Farm</i>	Highfield Farm is located on 15 acres in the heart of an industrial community in the city of Calgary. It is now seeing new life in a community of groups, businesses and individuals who contribute to the development of the gardens, park spaces, composting efforts, education and more.

Playgrounds

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces <i>Rick Hansen Foundation</i>	This toolkit has information and best practices for communities to design accessible play space(s) that children of all abilities can engage in and enjoy.
Inclusive Playgrounds in Calgary <i>The City of Calgary</i>	The City of Calgary provides an interactive map of inclusive playgrounds in Calgary, with information on each site.
Playground Optimization Considerations <i>The City of Calgary</i>	The City of Calgary has a Playground Optimization Program, which may inspire community advocates as they become aware of how the program proposes the re-purposing of existing spaces.
Shouldice Inclusive Playground Features <i>The City of Calgary</i>	The City of Calgary hosts this report providing detail on playground features and benefits at Shouldice Inclusive Playground to provide insight into what an inclusive playground can be comprised of.
How to Create a Mobile Adventure Playground - A practical guide <i>Alberta Recreation and Parks Association</i>	Alberta Recreation and Parks Association provides a guide to inspire and invigorate efforts to promote child-led, unstructured, risky play in your community. The resource includes templates, and links to other organizations.
Calgary Playground Review <i>Volunteer Organization</i>	A community advocate led website offering a compilation of the best park and playground features around Calgary.
Inspection and Maintenance Program for Play Spaces <i>Alberta Health Services</i>	This checklist from AHS provides an unbiased perspective for Community Advocates who want to understand how play space condition is evaluated.

Projects with School Boards

Projects with School Boards will follow a different partnership and approvals process than projects on City of Calgary property. Community advocates looking to lead a project in collaboration with a school should start by engaging the existing parent societies and associations.

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
Catholic Schoolboard Playground and Outdoor Classroom Guidelines and Requirements <i>Calgary Catholic School Division</i>	Information detailing playground and outdoor classroom guidelines and requirements
CBE Parent Societies and Associations <i>Calgary Board of Education</i>	Information on parent societies, associations, and councils within the CBE.

Art Projects

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
Northeast Public Art Initiative <i>The City of Calgary</i>	The City of Calgary provides details on an initiative launched to increase public art opportunities in NE Calgary.
BUMP Festival <i>BUMP Festival</i>	BUMP is Calgary's street art festival. To date, the BUMP Festival has transformed Calgary with over 180+ public art installations, capturing the imagination of residents and visitors in a celebration of the arts and community.
Calgary Art Murals <i>Travel with the Smile</i>	A travel blog discussing a compilation of art murals in Calgary, providing inspiration for community art projects.
Calgary Public Art Map <i>The City of Calgary</i>	The City of Calgary provides an interactive map that enables community advocates to review the location of current public art installations.
Northern Hills Mural <i>Northern Hills Community Association</i>	Northern Hills Mural was a community art project in North Calgary engaging 800 volunteers in creating an 850-metre-long mural. Northern Hills Community Association hosts information about the project, which provides an example of activation and sharing stories of success.