



FEDERATION OF CALGARY COMMUNITIES
PLACEMAKING GRANTS & INNOVATION PROJECT
Spring 2025

“Placemaking is the practice of transforming (public) space into a vibrant and accessible place that enhances quality of life, social cohesion, economic value, and the cultural health” – Canadian Urban Institute, 2024.

OVERVIEW: Calgary’s growing and diverse population, including many newcomers and long-time residents, faces the challenge of social isolation as the city rapidly expands. With Calgary projected to reach 2 million people by 2029, the demand for public spaces is increasing, yet gathering places have not kept pace with this growth.

Placemaking is a proven solution to address this gap, fostering social connections, reducing loneliness, and improving mental well-being. Since 2017, ActivateYYC has empowered community-driven placemaking projects that transform underused spaces into vibrant, inclusive areas. From murals to parklets and traffic calming initiatives, these projects brought people together, formed new social bonds, and equipped residents with the skills to lead future efforts.

With demand far exceeding the current \$60k in grants offered by ActivateYYC, there is a growing need for more support in ideation, capacity building, and activation. Increasing these grants will spark a wave of community-led projects across Calgary, expanding our public space network and strengthening social cohesion. By amplifying placemaking, we can foster long-term community capacity, creating more vibrant, connected spaces for all.

A strong, placemaking culture has citywide benefits, improving social, health, environmental, economic, and cultural outcomes. It builds a more connected, resilient city, ensuring that as Calgary grows, its communities thrive together.

Project Goal: To build a lasting placemaking culture in Calgary by supporting and developing community-led projects and programs that create lively, inclusive public space.

1 Objectives

A. Enhance Public Spaces – Fund and support the installation of tangible amenities (e.g., seating, lighting, murals) and recurring programming (e.g., events, workshops) to activate underused spaces, making them more welcoming, dynamic, and socially engaging.

B. Build Community Capacity – Empower residents by providing mentorship and hands-on experience in project management, budgeting, and governance, equipping them with skills to lead future neighborhood initiatives.

C. Establish an Innovation Lab – provide a highly engaging and inclusive **demonstration of placemaking**, with consistent programming to inspire and energize the placemakers of Calgary. The 'Innovation Lab' will exist as a **gathering place** for grassroots city builders, community leaders and residents to ideate, connect, and lead placemaking projects.

D. Sustain Placemaking– develop a robust business plan and strategy for the sustainment of placemaking, elevating and positioning Calgary as a leader of placemaking in Western Canada.

2 Impact

Increased Social Connectivity & Reduced Isolation

The program will create welcoming public spaces that encourage social interactions, helping to reduce loneliness and strengthen neighborhood connections.

Enhanced Public Spaces & Vibrancy

Installing amenities and hosting community events will make underused spaces more inviting, increasing foot traffic and supporting local businesses.

Empowered Residents & Community Leadership

Providing mentorship and skill-building in project management, financial literacy, and governance will equip residents to lead future placemaking efforts and strengthen community ties.

Sustainable & Scalable Placemaking Model

The Innovation Lab and a long-term business strategy will ensure ongoing placemaking efforts, positioning Calgary as a leader in public space activation.

3 Activities

A. Grant Program & Capacity Support

- Offer accessible grant opportunities for community-led placemaking projects, with a flexible grant cycle that adapts to community needs.
- Provide communities with training and resources in areas like ideation, financial literacy, policy navigation, governance, and engagement to help them achieve successful placemaking outcomes.
- Equip grantees with physical and online resources, including rentals, materials, tools, toolkits, and best practice guides, to support the successful delivery of projects and programs.

B. Citizen Engagement & Storytelling

- Place-mapping Platform ('a 311 for placemaking ideas and opportunities).
- Host projects that engage and inspire future placemakers, volunteers, and residents, while collecting and sharing successful stories to showcase Calgary's placemaking culture.

C. Innovation Lab

- Host events, programs, and gatherings that demonstrate placemaking and celebrate community life.
- Develop community spaces for work, play, and gathering, including co-creation hubs for placemakers to network and collaborate.

D. Sustainability Planning

- Develop business plans focused on revenue and funding diversification, while building strategic partnerships between public and private sectors.

4 Alignment to City Policy

The proposed placemaking program directly supports the goals outlined in **Calgary's Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy (2022)**, which envisions a city where all residents feel safe, connected, and supported by addressing social isolation, mental health, and community belonging—core outcomes of placemaking.

This program aligns with **Calgary's Municipal Development Plan (MDP)** by fostering vibrant, inclusive communities and enhancing public spaces through placemaking. It supports social well-being by empowering residents to shape their neighborhoods while improving accessibility and safety. The initiative promotes sustainable urban development by revitalizing underused spaces rather than expanding outward, aligning with smart growth principles. Additionally, it contributes to economic vibrancy by increasing foot traffic and supporting local businesses.

| Budget | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Grants for Placemaking and Demonstrations | \$420,000 | \$420,000 | \$420,000 |
| Capacity Building and Grant Support | \$111,250 | \$84,000 | \$86,530 |
| Citizen Engagement and Storytelling | \$55,000 | \$55,900 | \$56,700 |
| Resource Library and Platform | \$88,000 | \$32,000 | \$26,000 |
| Innovation Lab - Demonstration Project | \$334,000 | \$344,000 | \$354,320 |
| Total Annual Commitments | \$978,250 | \$935,900 | \$943,550 |

Total Investment: \$2.85 million over 3 years

Grantmaking Precedents (ActivateYYC 2017-2024)

ActivateYYC was established in 2017 and has since existed as a successful and reliable tactical urbanism microgrant program funded by the City of Calgary. Over 180 projects and \$400,000 have been distributed to citizen-led initiatives since its inception. The program won a Mayor's Urban Design Award in the Community Initiatives category in 2024, for its instrumental work in allowing communities to transform space into place.



Dark and Dingy Underpass - Ramsay SE
Ramsay Community Association - 2024



Pop-up Park - Killarney SW
Christian Life Assembly Church - 2024



Traffic Calming - Martindale NE
Sustainable Calgary - 2023

Placemaking Program Precedents

Better Block (Dallas, TX)

Better Block is a nonprofit organization that transforms underused urban areas into vibrant, people-friendly spaces through temporary demonstrations, community engagement, and tactical urbanism projects that inspire long-term change.



Evergreen Brick Works (Toronto, ON)

Evergreen Brick Works is a dynamic public space and sustainability hub that transforms a former industrial site into a center for environmental education, community programming, and urban innovation.



Neighbourhood Design Center (Baltimore, MD)

The Neighborhood Design Center (NDC) is a nonprofit that provides pro-bono design, planning, and community engagement services to support equitable neighborhood revitalization and empower local residents to shape their public spaces.

