

STREETS FOR PANDEMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY

2021 Grant Program





Photo & Cover photo: City of Fort Collins

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the staff in the 10 grantee cities for your dedication to completing bold projects in just six months, and for being teachers and learners with your peers in that time.

Thank you to the embedded partners who have been working tirelessly to support your communities long before the pandemic arrived and have adapted quickly to the extreme challenges of the past two years.

Thank you to transportation justice experts Tamika L. Butler and Naomi Doerner, who contributed invaluable thought leadership and support to NACTO staff and the grantees throughout this project.

Finally, thank you to Bloomberg Philanthropies for your generous funding to make this initiative possible.

ABOUT NACTO

NACTO is an association of 92 major North American cities and transit agencies formed to exchange transportation ideas, insights, and practices to cooperatively approach national transportation issues.

NACTO's mission is to build cities as places for people, with safe, sustainable, accessible, and equitable transportation choices that support a strong economy and vibrant quality of life. We do this by:

- **Building the Movement:** Communicating a bold vision for 21st century urban mobility and building strong leadership capacity among city transportation officials.
- **Advancing a Unified City Voice:** Empowering a coalition of cities to lead the way on transportation policy at the local, state, and national levels.
- **Accelerating Change:** Raising the state of the practice for street design that prioritizes people walking, biking, and taking transit.



Photo: City of Fort Collins

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FOREWORD

Just over one year ago, I wrote here that the United States had suffered through 15 million cases of Covid-19 and almost 300,000 deaths. Today, several surges and many variants later, we've hit nearly 80 million cases and are closing in on 1 million deaths. I said then it was mind-numbing; now it's almost inconceivable.

The first round of Streets for Pandemic Response & Recovery grants harnessed the urgent need to claim street space for safe, socially distanced recreation as Americans worked from home, and to expand economic activity and social services in communities hit hardest by public health lockdowns. That year, grantees from Alexandria to Portland used their transportation infrastructure as instruments to improve safety, reduce inequality, and to help them do so much more with so much less.

As the pandemic still raged in 2021, this latest cohort of grantee cities had to react to the day's most pressing needs while also laying the groundwork for a more sustainable, equitable future. From focusing on hiring local—by partnering with local businesses and artists in new public spaces and markets—to ensuring pandemic-era pop-ups were built into long-term municipal strategic plans, this year's grantees didn't just respond to the seemingly continuous state of alarm, but helped overcome and plan beyond it.

They reimagined their cities' streets not by dictating solutions but by listening closely to communities, and heard the stories that informed and inspired the work to build sustainable, equitable, and inclusive streets from coast to coast.

A long road ahead remains. Planners have never had more powerful examples of solutions that have been tested, proven, and perfected in hundreds of cities. But as the number of traffic deaths has soared to alarming levels, cities more than ever need strong political will and action as much as they need prototypes.

This group of grantees demonstrates the resolve to overcome the worst impacts of the pandemic era, and the belief that a better future is possible—and that it must be planned for.

JANETTE SADIK-KHAN
Principal, Bloomberg Associates;
NACTO Chair



BACKGROUND

Since the start of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused interwoven public health, economic, and social justice crises across the globe. As of the writing of this report, Covid-19 has infected more than 437 million people and taken the lives of 5.96 million people worldwide. The United States alone has recorded 78.9 million cases and 949,000 deaths. And while the Covid-19 pandemic has affected nearly everyone, the health and economic impacts have fallen disproportionately on this country's low-income communities of color.

Over the past two years, NACTO member cities and transit agencies have crafted and refined projects and processes that guided their cities through a just pandemic response and recovery. NACTO has supported our members in this work through our Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery resources, including [written documentation of current practices](#), many hours of [webinars and audio recordings](#), and a complete online [Transportation Response Center](#) that offered support during the first difficult months of the pandemic. NACTO's pandemic response support has centered a series of key design principles that cities can use as a model to inform ongoing Covid-19 response strategies:

- Support the most vulnerable people first;
- Amplify and support public health guidance;
- Create safer streets for today and tomorrow;
- Support workers and local economies;
- Partner with community-based organizations; and
- Act now and adapt over time.

A cornerstone of NACTO's pandemic response work, and an exemplification of these principles in action, has been the [Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery grant program](#).

During the first North American surge of the Covid-19 pandemic in spring and summer 2020, NACTO offered grant support to ten cities that, in partnership with community-based organizations, were using these principles to reimagine streets to meet the needs of populations disproportionately harmed by Covid-19. These 10 city-community partnerships leveraged community-rooted partners' local expertise and relationships alongside city staff's ability to implement projects in the right-of-way, setting precedent for a city-community partnership model to be adopted for future rapid response transportation projects. The first round of projects were completed in December 2020.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT



In spring 2021, vaccinations were on the rise, children in many places were returning to school, and decision-makers were weighing safe opportunities to lift restrictions. But the crisis was not over, and the pandemic's public health, social, and economic impacts were still unfolding. For communities that have faced historic disinvestment, the inequities that existed before the pandemic began—and were brought sharply into focus during 2020—continued to deepen.

As we began inching toward a full reopening in spring 2021, NACTO knew that cities could not return to a pre-pandemic "normal" that disinvested in communities and amplified economic and racial inequities. For transportation agencies, this meant preparing for, planning, and implementing projects based on and in response to stated community needs with meaningful input, leadership, and guidance from community members. The pandemic response was far from over, and NACTO recognized the need for another round of grant funding for cities to develop rapid response projects in partnership with community-based organizations.

Building on the success of 2020's ten city-community partner teams, NACTO, with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, again offered grant support to 10 city transportation agencies that centered community expertise in Covid-19 response and recovery. NACTO offered the grant recipients funding, as well as cohort learning with peer cities and community groups, technical assistance, and expert coaching. Based on lessons from the 2020 program, in 2021 NACTO doubled the per-city grant award from \$25,000 to \$50,000 and lengthened the program from 3 to 5 months so that cities and community partners could take more time to build relationships and co-create project plans before diving into project design and implementation.

This year's 10 city-community teams created new outdoor spaces for local businesses to thrive, hired local artists to paint murals for new community gathering spaces, implemented crucial safety improvements, and offered community services in public plazas. They also spent deep and critical time together to forge relationships, and developed models and strategies for city-community partnerships in the future, proving that transportation projects are most effective and just when the end-users lead the way.

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Baltimore

LAKE-TO-LAKE PUBLIC SPACE

Partners: Black People Ride Bikes, Bikemore, Graham Projects

SUMMARY

Druid Hill Park and Lake Montebello have been important resources for Baltimore residents to exercise and gather outdoors during the Covid-19 pandemic, but the major arterial roads at each park's entrance created unsafe conditions for cyclists and pedestrians. In partnership with Black People Ride Bikes (BPRB), Bikemore, and Graham Projects, Baltimore DOT implemented traffic calming measures and right-of-way art improvements at the main bicycle and pedestrian access points of both parks. BPRB and Bikemore hosted community events to celebrate the improvements, and to kick off engagement about right-of-way art and longer-term bike network plans. Also, based on public conversations and drawings submitted by residents via [COLORoW](#), a custom online public art drawing tool, Graham Projects developed design proposals that over 500 residents voted on in selecting the final work of traffic calming public art.



Photo: Side A Photography

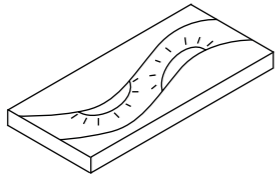
Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott hosts a community event to announce that the inner Montebello traffic loop will be closed permanently to vehicles.

Baltimore

LAKE-TO-LAKE PUBLIC SPACE

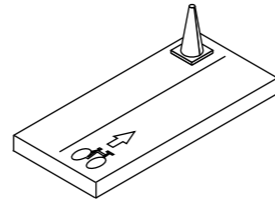
Partners: Black People Ride Bikes, Bikemore, Graham Projects

OUTCOMES



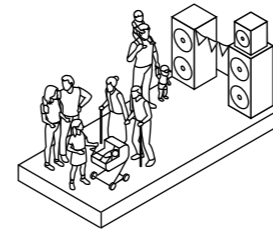
9,850

square feet of asphalt reclaimed through pavement art



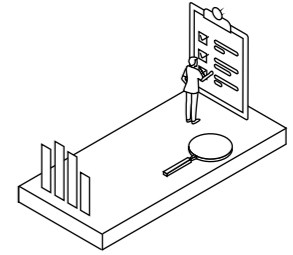
7+

new sections of traffic calming and safety infrastructure



13+

community events with over **736 attendees**



79%

of community survey respondents said they feel safer or much safer with the new traffic calming designs

NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Leaned into organizational strengths. Baltimore DOT applied their traffic engineering expertise to lead design, planning, and installation for the traffic calming and safety elements of the projects, with input from their community partners. The community partners leveraged their neighborhood expertise to engage with local residents about the projects and lead the celebration events. City staff remained on-hand to ensure the community had the resources, space, and time to do what they needed.

Leveraged unexpected funding to turn it up a notch. City staff were already planning to redesign the park access points when the grant became available. They leveraged the additional funds to move quickly and gave this project meaningful public exposure through events, celebrations, and deeper community engagement.

Used quick-build to create more permanent processes. Baltimore's quick-build project enabled them to pilot designs as they finalize their larger network-based plan. Likewise, community-centered engagement strategies for this project inspired a need for more permanent and standardized community outreach processes for future Baltimore DOT projects that focus less on mass communications and more on interpersonal engagement.



The new gateway to Lake Montebello Park slows vehicle speeds and improves safety for cyclists and pedestrians.



Photo: City and County of Denver Staff

The Clarkson Street mural creates a space for future community events, vaccination clinics, and seating for local restaurants.

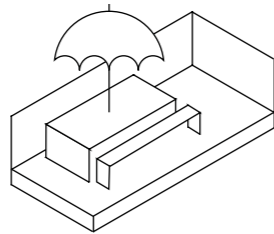
SUMMARY

The Five Points community - Denver's first predominantly Black neighborhood - has a vibrant history of jazz and culture. However, decades of redlining, disinvestment, and gentrification left the neighborhood's residents and businesses highly vulnerable when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020. While a robust outdoor dining program emerged across Denver, BIPOC-owned and operated businesses in the community were not applying to take part. After talking to community leaders and identifying barriers that prevented applications, Denver's Department of Transportation & Infrastructure (DOTI) partnered with the Five Points Business Improvement District (BID) to close Clarkson Street to vehicular traffic in order to maximize space for people and businesses. They created a shared "cafeteria-style" outdoor dining set-up where diners can enjoy food safely, restaurants can build clientele to accelerate economic recovery, local artists can feature their work, and the city can host future community events like vaccination pop-ups and their annual Juneteenth parade.

OUTCOMES

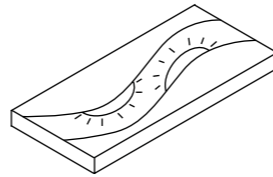
5,500+

square feet of activated sidewalk and street space, including nighttime lighting and restaurant seating



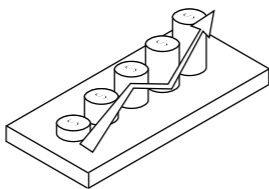
1

public art installation from a community-based artist



\$10,000

directly to community artists



18

community meetings held for coordination and design

NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Procured local materials. During the project, supply chain delays prompted DOTI to reconsider their typical procurement strategy and instead buy items like paint, tables, and chairs from local vendors. This adaptability was crucial to obtaining the items that were necessary for the completion of the project, and provided DOTI with the opportunity to support the local economy.

BID led business engagement, DOTI led design. The Five Points BID and DOTI applied innovative thinking and played to their strengths to make this project a success. With close business connections, the BID worked to understand the kinds of seating, shade, activities, and space that were needed in order for businesses to be successful in the new outdoor area. They also handled day-to-day space operations and maintenance. DOTI, in turn, relied on their technical expertise to navigate city processes, such as ADA requirements, emergency vehicle access, and urban design for functionality and safety concerns.

Provided additional funding for materials. During the course of the project, DOTI was able to provide CARES funding for reimbursement grants to businesses to make up for what they spent on materials. They realized that businesses would need funding to help continue improvements down the line and, therefore, are beginning to discuss how to obtain additional economic development grants to continue programs such as this more permanently in the future, especially in areas where Denver plans to invest in green infrastructure and public space.

SUMMARY

In 2021, after 15 years of discussion, the City of Fort Collins finally brought their community-driven asphalt art program to life. As part of the program, the City has established a "Paint Pot," which funds local artists and low-income residents to design, install, and maintain asphalt art projects in their own neighborhoods. In its inaugural year, the Paint Pot funded installations in three communities, including through compensation for local partner Bike Fort Collins to engage with neighbors and provide technical support at the project sites.



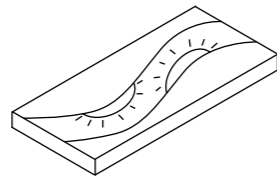
“

“I feel very proud and satisfied to have participated in this project and I identify a lot with my community and am grateful to the City [and] Bike Fort Collins.”

Hickory Street Installation Neighborhood Lead

Photos: City of Fort Collins

OUTCOMES

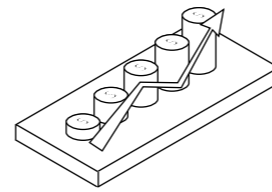


3

asphalt art installations by community-based artists

168

participants assisting with mural painting



\$3,000

directly to community artists

NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Commissioned artists and designs that represent the neighborhood. The City of Fort Collins and Bike Fort Collins worked together with the community to identify and hire artists who were either from the neighborhood where the installation was occurring, or had connections and relationships within the community. The designs often told the history or story of the neighborhood, and provided a reflection of local residents' stories through art.

Made the installation an event. Each art installation took four days, during which the hired artist and city staff prepared and painted the roadway, and community members attended installation events to watch, eat a provided picnic lunch, or even jump in to help with painting. Other community members also joined each installation in an act of service to the local community. Making the installation an event gave the community ownership over the space and excitement about the final product.

Fostered trust through authentic relationship-building. Oftentimes, city staff leverage community events to gather information about specific projects or programs, an approach that successfully meets people where they are, but also one that can feel transactional. In Fort Collins, the three Paint Pot-funded installation events were instead neighborhood gatherings where community members led the interactions they wanted to have with city staff. These conversations created powerful and meaningful connections without any of the extractive quality that sometimes comes up during engagement between cities and communities.

HICKORY

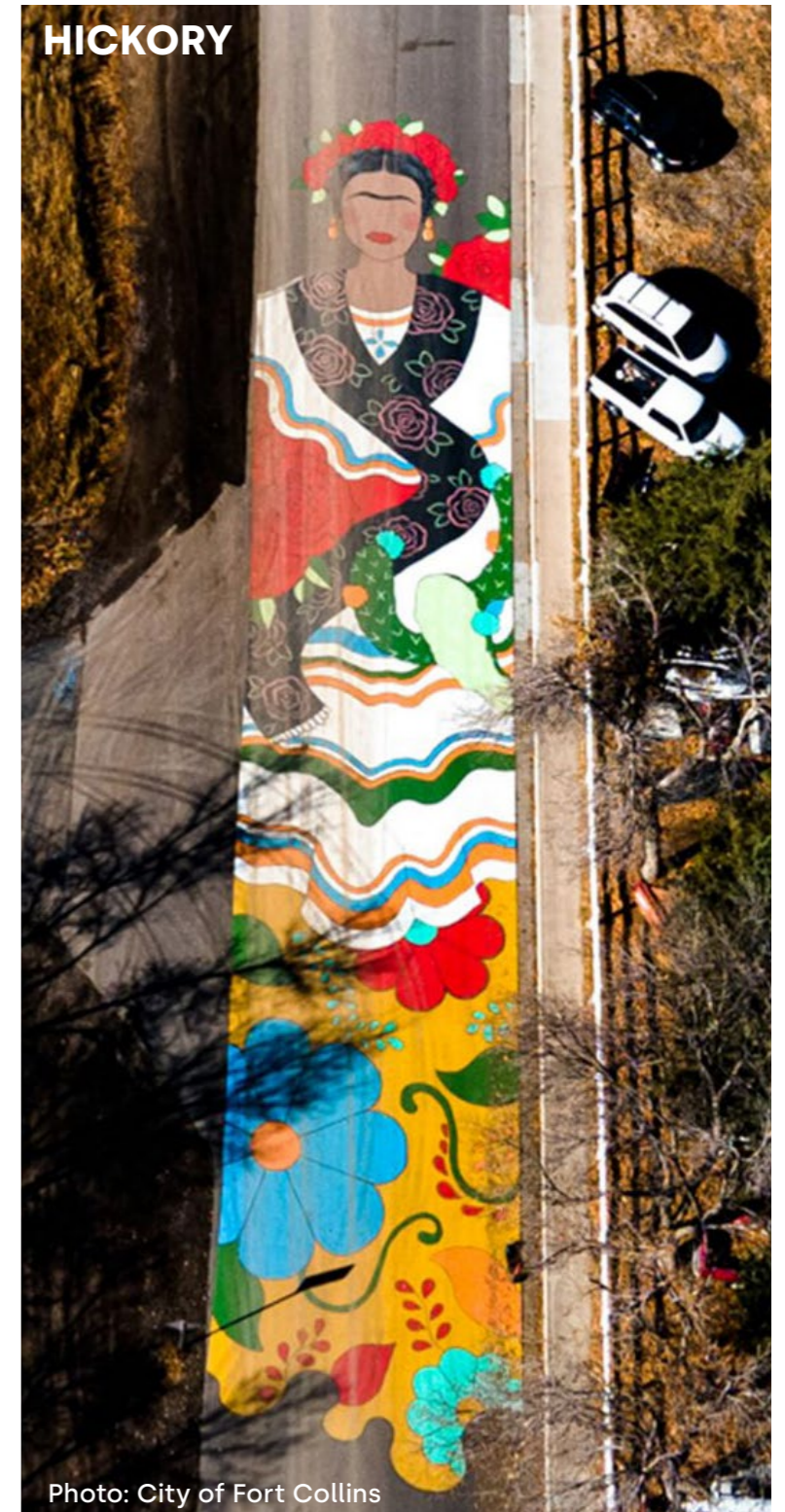


Photo: City of Fort Collins

SUMMARY

Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS), administered by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), has been innovating approaches to calm traffic in school zones, particularly in densely populated areas where schools are anchors of the community. Upon children's return to in-person school in August 2021, SRTS sought safer bicycle and pedestrian access to schools in two communities that had been economically strained by the Covid-19 pandemic. In partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and Los Angeles Walks, SRTS created a temporary pedestrian/bicycle-only zone during student drop-off on the block of the Dayton Heights Elementary's main entrance. Los Angeles Walks also hosted virtual design workshops with school and non-school community members at Manchester Avenue Elementary to understand their safety and travel concerns, and inform recommendations for safer routes to and from the school. Securing social-distancing space for school gate Covid protocols and a convening space for the community provided a trial template for future Zero Emissions Zones, as part of the City of Los Angeles Green New Deal.



Photos: Los Angeles Walks

Students at Dayton Heights Elementary School and paid community members play on their pop-up school street.

Los Angeles

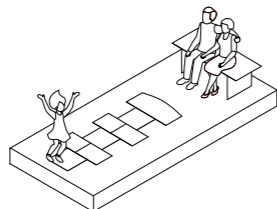
SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL STREETS

Partner: Los Angeles Walks

OUTCOMES

18

parking spaces temporarily transformed into play and pedestrian spaces



118

participants engaged between 27 events from October to November

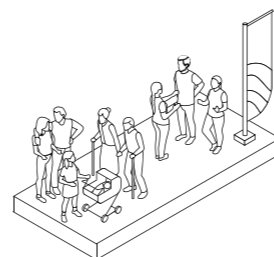


Photo: Los Angeles Walks

Community services, like this public library truck, visit the Dayton Heights "school street."

NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Took the time for individualized outreach. Los Angeles Walks spent hours canvassing door-to-door with residents who live adjacent to the project area and with parents during school pick-up and drop-off. This individualized approach provided a clear picture of hyperlocal concerns, informing SRTS' planning efforts. Through canvassing, Los Angeles Walks also learned that residents prefer text message communication to emails, listservs, or calls. All School Street notifications and updates were disseminated via text message.

Compensated parent and resident staff. While canvassing, Los Angeles Walks advertised stipend positions for managing weekday School Street installation/breakdown and programming at the Dayton Heights Elementary SRTS School Street. Several parents were alumni and already had a base rapport with students that helped break the ice as children gained confidence playing in the space.

Remained flexible through a community-centered design process. SRTS also anticipated installing a SRTS School Street at Manchester Avenue Elementary. Los Angeles Walks' canvassing efforts, however, exposed a legacy of mistrust among residents and distrust for city agency infrastructure decision-making, and revealed concerns about the project's impact on vehicle access to their street and driveways, and personal safety relating to parking around the corner from their residences. SRTS pivoted their design approach, hosting a school/non-school community virtual workshop and design charrette to inform a mutually-feasible solution.

Madison, WI

CARTS IN PARKS: A PARKS VENDING PILOT PROGRAM

Partner: Latino Chamber of Commerce

SUMMARY

Madison's robust community of street vendors, who all operate in the public right-of-way, experienced significant revenue losses during the Covid-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, many Madison residents started spending more time with their neighbors in Madison's parks, increasing interest in vending within city parks. To address the needs of vendors while fulfilling requests of other community members, an interdepartmental team at the City of Madison, in partnership with the Latino Chamber of Commerce, offered a guaranteed sales program to minority-owned mobile vendors who were newly operating in city parks, and hosted food-based community events to feature vendors and build community. The pilot created more opportunities for mobile vending in parks and promoted economic recovery and business growth for vendors.



Photo: Kathryn Premo Mingione

Madison community members shop with local cart-based vendors at several community food-centered events.

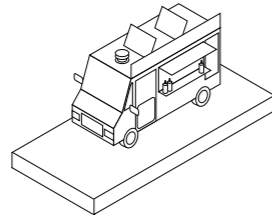


Photo: Cool Sweet Treats (Juan Hernandez)



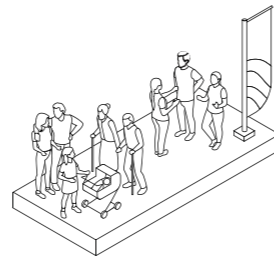
Photo: City of Madison

OUTCOMES



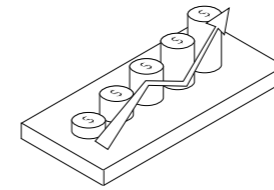
6+

brand new businesses who opened for the first time because of this program



300

people at the largest community event, where 5 food carts sold out



\$50,000

earmarked in the City of Madison's 2022 budget to run a second year of the Carts in Parks program

14

community food events run by the Latino Chamber of Commerce

NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Reimbursed businesses for lost sales. Because the City of Madison was working with minority-owned businesses who experienced extreme revenue loss during the pandemic months, they reimbursed businesses for lost sales below \$500 for up to two weeks, otherwise known as a “guaranteed sales” program. This allowed vendors to test new spots in the parks without risking a loss in revenue, and gave time for the community to learn about the presence of new vendors.

Centered cross-department and cross-partner collaboration. Madison Economic Development, Madison Parks Department, Madison Transportation Engineering, and the Latino Chamber of Commerce all collaborated closely to make this program successful. All of the entities spoke nearly daily to remove any lapses in communication and to ensure that fast program delivery did not come at the expense of meaningful engagement with the vendors and residents. It was critical for the city agencies to burst out of their own silos to work across the city, leveraging important resources and partnerships.

Dedicated one full-time staff member to street vending. The City of Madison has a full-time Street Vending Coordinator who handles all permitting, processes, and programs related to street vending. This unique city position allows for a robust street vending program with room to innovate and collaborate across agencies.

Waived Madison Park's vending permit fees for qualifying community events and daily food cart vendors. The vending permit fees and policies in public parks have not been assessed for decades. The current fees are cost prohibitive to have vending at a community event or to vend daily as a food cart. The Carts in Parks program gave the city vendor and community feedback as well as data to assess Madison Park's vending permit, policies, and fees.



SUMMARY

In 2020, the community of 18th Ave & Little Earth saw a persistent increase in crime, speeding, and civil unrest following the murder of George Floyd. Community members from Little Earth of United Tribes, the only urban Indigenous Section 8 rental assistance community in the United States, implemented their own traffic calming measures to diminish speeding and advocate for livability and safety. In response to this initial community effort, the City of Minneapolis, in partnership with the Little Earth Residents Association, developed a transportation study and engagement plan to foster solutions for permanent safety changes within the community. Together they implemented and integrated temporary demonstration projects, interim changes to street design to deter speeding, street art reflective of Indigenous culture, and street furniture to establish the sense of safety necessary to build community, accountability, and ownership. City staff plan to partner with Little Earth to conduct two more engagement events and produce a final safe streets implementation plan in spring of 2022, which will outline potential permanent changes that would be implemented as part of a future capital project.

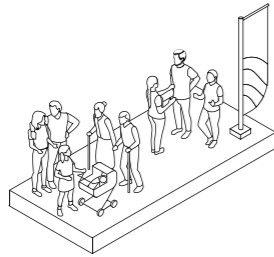


The Little Earth Residents Association and their community co-create a safe and welcoming space near a public park.



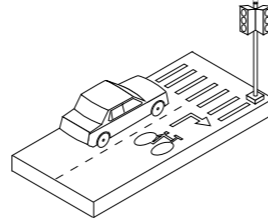
Photos: City of Minneapolis Public Works

OUTCOMES



2,112

square feet of street space transformed into community gathering space



7%

decrease in 85th percentile speeds along the project streets

19%

decrease in daily vehicle traffic on 3 neighborhood streets in 2021 compared to 2019



NOTABLE STRATEGY

Co-worked in shared office space. To develop trust and a genuine connection with the Little Earth community, city staff worked in the Little Earth Residents Association offices once weekly, not only to be available for project-specific tasks, but to show a commitment from the city to work in true partnership with the community and their requests. This approach fostered an open dialogue with the community, and created a foundation to further connect the community with other city agencies and resources.



Photos: City of Minneapolis Public Works

Portland, OR

PARKING SPACES TO PEOPLE PLACES

Partner: Rosewood Initiative

SUMMARY

The Rosewood Initiative — in partnership with Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) — piloted a project in East Portland to convert a neighborhood parking lot into an open market space. In a community where infrastructure challenges have created high-traffic, high-fatal-ity streets with little opportunity for pandemic recovery of local businesses and community services, this project successfully established a market that provided opportunities for local businesses, community services, and shopping for residents. The events included food, hand-crafted goods, and public services from government agencies, all right next to a Covid-19 vaccine clinic. Rosewood also prioritized table space for local businesses that were very small, culturally specific, and in need of additional assistance to grow. After the market, they connected those specific local businesses with a community organization to create a business incubator program. [The events were so successful](#) that Rosewood has earmarked funds to continue and expand the markets in 2022.

Local vendors, community service providers, and Rosewood Initiative staff collaborate to bring their Saturday market events to life.



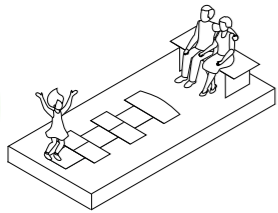
Photos: The Rosewood Initiative

Portland, OR

PARKING SPACES TO PEOPLE PLACES

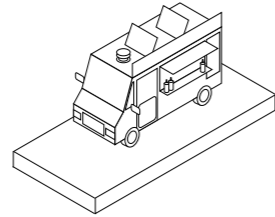
Partner: Rosewood Initiative

OUTCOMES



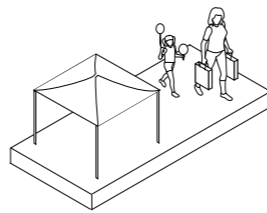
13,000

square feet of plaza
space activation



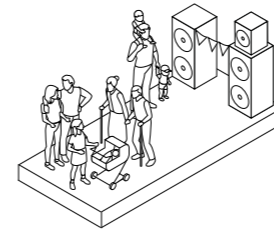
40

participating small
neighborhood
businesses



4

Saturday market events



1,400

event attendees

783

Covid-19 vaccinations
administered

43

participating nonprofit
and government partners

NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Leveraged partnership for equitable outcomes. With only 9 staff members, the Rosewood Initiative utilized the resources provided by PBOT in order to successfully establish this project. PBOT, in turn, benefited from Rosewood's ability to have more autonomy and flexibility within their work. This symbiotic relationship allowed for Rosewood to secure more visibility, volunteer help, and an additional funding pool that they otherwise would not have been able to obtain. Also, PBOT was able to invest in the community upfront, through Rosewood's direction, allowing PBOT to use their resources to support a more equitable foundation for business opportunities.

Took advantage of already established events and infrastructure. Rosewood was able to align economic, cultural, and social objectives through a single project. Since the adjacent building to the parking lot where the markets were held housed their vaccine clinic, Rosewood leveraged this opportunity to increase their vaccination efforts. This brought more people to both events, leading to a 100% increase in vaccinations on the market days compared to other days.

Supported both buyers and sellers. As a way to support not only their vendors, but also those within the community, the Rosewood Initiative created Rosewood Bucks as a way to subsidize shoppers and vendors alike. These voucher dollars were provided for free to market goers to use at vendor stands and, in turn, vendors handed these dollars back into Rosewood to receive payment.



Photo: The Rosewood Initiative

San Francisco

SAFE PASSAGE PARK

Partner: Tenderloin Community Benefit District (TLCBD)

SUMMARY

San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood — two-thirds of which consists of immigrants and people of color — experienced a massive increase of unhoused people during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the resulting increase in tents along the already crowded sidewalk, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) expanded this pedestrian space and responded to the needs of the community. Continuing from their efforts of expanding pedestrian space into the parking lane along Turk Street to provide more physical distance, SFMTA — in partnership with Tenderloin Community Benefit District (TLCBD) — enhanced their Safe Passage Park Project along Turk Street. This collaborative effort not only provided community programming and resources to people living on the block, but it also expanded sidewalk infrastructure in order to improve pedestrian safety and space for children and seniors alike.

Safe Passage Park offers space for pedestrians to move and for TLCBD to host weekly community events.



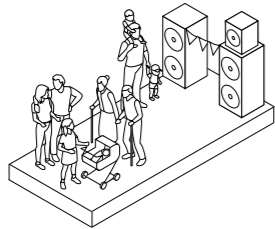
Photo: Shayda Haghgoo

San Francisco

SAFE PASSAGE PARK

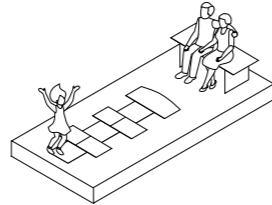
Partner: Tenderloin Community Benefit District (TLCBD)

OUTCOMES



10-15

public events per week
for 5 months



95

pedestrians in the
space per day
in October 2021,
compared to 35 per
day in August 2021

120

feet of active
curbside loading
zones created for
local businesses and
residents



Photos: Shayda Haghgoo

NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Partnered with organizations to assist the unhoused community. SFMTA and TLCBD partnered with an organization called Urban Alchemy to engage with residents living in the temporary encampments near the project corridor. With the help of Urban Alchemy, the team prioritized keeping the space near the encampments and the project safe and clean. They also engaged the unhoused community on the block, connecting them with resources and asking for input on the project.

Created connections across city agencies. Through this project, SFMTA ensured that TLCBD had contacts and connections in other necessary city agencies like the Fire Department and the Department of Public Works. Now TLCBD has more relationships within city agencies to assist with current and future projects.



SUMMARY

In 2021, residents in the Little Brook neighborhood — a historically disinvested community hard-hit by the Covid-19 pandemic — expressed a desire for more safe, open spaces close to their neighborhood. In response, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), in partnership with Lake City Collective (LCC), installed a Stay Healthy Street on 32nd Ave NE in the dense Little Brook neighborhood - closing part of the street to cars to create open space and offer community programming while students were out of school. To address community concerns about high speeds, SDOT and LCC also installed traffic-calming measures, including a walkway, painted curb bulbs, and a street mural designed by a local artist to honor Indigenous culture.



This street mural honors Indigenous culture and slows vehicle speeds along 32nd Ave.

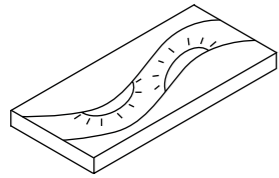


Photos: Lake City Collective



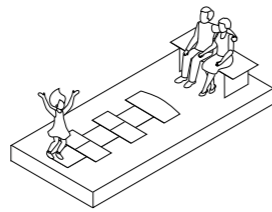
Lake City Collective hosts a large community event, including a mariachi band and activities for children.

OUTCOMES



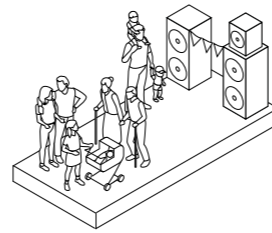
1,400

square feet of asphalt reclaimed through pavement art



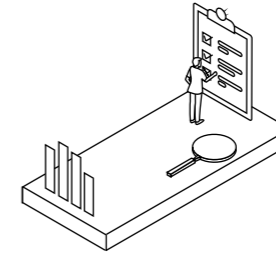
5,000

square feet of public space extended in front of the Little Brook Park



8

events in the new public space that contributed to the sense of community and belonging



141

surveys collected (99 in English, 40 in Spanish, and 2 in Amharic) with **81%** in favor of making the Stay Healthy Street space permanent

1,500

square feet of invasive shrubbery cleared

NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Collaborated with the community on parking solutions. SDOT's updated street design removed some private parking within the right-of-way, but also added new public back-in parking spots. In order to reach this parking solution, SDOT worked closely with community members and businesses to ensure the parking updates suited their needs. LCC and SDOT conducted initial outreach by sending letters to, and conducting meetings with, local property managers and owners. They also leveraged their resources with NACTO and its cohort group in order to obtain advice on not only how to approach property owners, but to also develop design ideas, sketches, and big picture concepts for rapid implementation.

Implemented street art for beauty, economic recovery, and safety. As a way of celebrating the neighborhood's racially and culturally diverse community, LCC commissioned a local artist to create a street mural celebrating Indigenous heritage. This project provided the opportunity to put money back into the community, build community pride, and assist with traffic calming objectives.

Paid community members to enhance, activate, clean, and maintain the space. LCC worked with youth and local parents to build planter boxes, plant vegetables, and create an outdoor photo booth. They hired local neighbors to maintain the planter boxes and pooled resources to get a basketball hoop with extra basketballs. They also held events like food trucks and movie nights to gather people in the space, and hired local musicians for most of these events. LCC conducted community waste cleanups, which involved paying community members to do routine cleaning with materials, like grabbers and trash bags, provided by the city. SDOT also partnered with Parks maintenance crews to more frequently empty trash bins on the street and SDOT crews helped maintain the street closure by changing or improving the barricades.



Photo: SDOT
(Seattle Department of Transportation)

Washington, DC

A CIVIC PLAZA FOR ALL

Partner: District Bridges

SUMMARY

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) partnered with local community development non-profit District Bridges to revitalize the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza. Together they created a shared outdoor dining area that gives businesses new opportunities to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as open space for free outdoor events like fitness classes, food distribution, and a bike maintenance station. The pilot project also sparked more permanent changes to the plaza, including funding for dedicated staff at District Bridges to run plaza programming and continued collaboration with the governmental interagency working group.



Photos: District Bridges

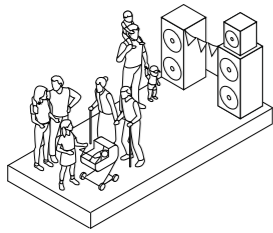
Community members fix up bikes and shop for books at the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza.

Washington, DC

A CIVIC PLAZA FOR ALL

Partner: District Bridges

OUTCOMES



60

events over 5 months,
with a total of **1364**
participants

MONTHLY

interagency meetings with
11 city agencies and
3 community nonprofits

2

dedicated full-time staff at
District Bridges who will run plaza
programming in the coming fiscal year



NOTABLE STRATEGIES

Leveraged seed funding to build capacity at community organizations.

After proving the success, as well as the systemic challenges, of the Civic Plaza's community programming during the quick-build pilot, District Bridges worked with a councilmember to earmark funds to bring on two full-time staff members who will be dedicated to running plaza programming in the years to come. As District Bridges staff said, "Were it not for the NACTO pilot [and the support of a local councilmember], we would not have the earmark we have today."

Assembled a working group to facilitate cross-agency coordination.

Because the Civic Plaza's infrastructure and social service needs are the jurisdiction of several city agencies, it was essential to establish a working group with staff from all the relevant agencies. The group met weekly and conducted a site visit together in the mid-stages of the pilot. And because the group was spearheaded by the neighborhood's Councilwoman, the city agencies got the extra push they needed to take ownership over their responsibilities in the plaza.



Photos: District Bridges

TAKEAWAYS

The takeaways below are NACTO's reflections and observations on opportunities that cities have to succeed in community-centered project development and delivery. They represent a combination of what NACTO observed throughout the 2021 grant program and synthesized findings about quick build community-based projects.

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Partnership Models

All agencies participating in the grant cohort were intentional about how they wanted to partner with community organizations for their projects. Among the cities there was a noticeable spectrum of partnership models, each with observed strengths and potential considerations for cities that may choose that model for their own projects.

City-led

Community-led

At one end of the spectrum were projects in which the **city took the lead on the project design**, while the partner helped foster community support and implement the project.

OBSERVED STRENGTHS:

- Projects could tie easily into the city's broader strategic goals and plans.
- Offered extra opportunities for community partners to lead celebrations and site activities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CITIES THAT CHOOSE THIS MODEL:

- This model can be a slippery slope into more feedback-based engagement models, meaning that the community feels as if they are only being consulted on something that the city plans to do no matter the feedback. This leads to less buy-in and feelings of ownership from the communities. Cities should ensure they are actively soliciting input from community members in a way that fosters authentic collaboration and truly integrates community feedback.

In the middle of the spectrum were projects in which the **initial ideas came from both community partners and the city agency**, and both parties were involved in planning and implementation.

OBSERVED STRENGTHS:

- This model enabled the teams to leverage their own organizational strengths, often with the technical and bureaucratic pieces handled by the city agency to make room for partners to lead community-building efforts.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CITIES THAT CHOOSE THIS MODEL:

- With each organization leading large portions of the project, city and community partners should plan for significant and very frequent coordination to ensure they are always on the same page.
- With all partners intensively involved, it can be more challenging to define and stick to specific project roles, sometimes leading to confusion on tasks such as operations and logistics for community events.

At the other end of the spectrum were projects in which the **community partner led ideation and implementation**, and the city played more of a supporting role.

OBSERVED STRENGTHS:

- Gave the community organizations more autonomy and offered increased flexibility for project delivery, including tasks such as purchasing their own project materials, as well as more buy-in and ownership over the project.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CITIES THAT CHOOSE THIS MODEL:

- Cities can miss out on a wide range of opportunities for deeper community relationship-building if they hand off the project entirely and choose not to directly engage with their partners throughout the process.
- Cities should still be active partners in the project, staying in communication with their partners to help them navigate bureaucratic challenges, project hurdles, and other tasks where the community needs support.

Cities should be aware of, and intentional about, where projects sit on this spectrum, and establish clear goals to ensure they are selecting the right partnership model for each specific project. Regardless of which partnership model they select, it is important to elevate the expertise of the community members who will be using the site, and remove resource and bureaucratic barriers for their community partners when they interface with government agencies.

Relationship-building

Most agencies participating in the grant cohort had some relationship with their community partners before applying for the grant. The agencies who had the longest-standing relationships with their partners had more success delivering their projects quickly without generating distrust among local residents about the speed of project implementation.

Several cities used their grant projects to further deepen their relationships with community members and organizations, showing their commitment by visiting communities often, working in shared office space, connecting community members with other resources and government agencies when needed, and transparently following up on the community's requests. These cities took ownership of their own responsibility to foster trust, particularly where local governments have previously harmed and disinvested in communities.

Building relationships takes more time than a quick-build process affords. It is important for cities to invest time and resources into establishing relationships with embedded community members and/or organizations even before the city needs something or has a specific project in mind. This is especially true in neighborhoods that have experienced a history of neglect and disinvestment. This relationship-building must be ongoing: before project ideas arise, while project planning is underway, and after projects are complete.



Photo: The Rosewood Initiative

Co-Creating and Co-Working

Grant recipients applied with models of co-creation and co-working between the city and community partners that allowed them to leverage organizational strengths while diffusing historically unbalanced power dynamics. For example, many city staff worked closely with their community partners to define goals for the project at the onset, including defining key terms like “safety” and identifying what would make the local community feel safe in the project site. Teams also worked together to consider how they wanted to support the unhoused community members occupying project sites, and who would provide that support. Defining goals and developing common language together offered a strong foundation for meaningful collaboration throughout the project.

Once the foundation was set, strong teams often worked together in offices and/or checked in daily to maintain transparency and stay true to their collaborative goals. Because of their mutual ownership over the project, these teams were able to cultivate joy and excitement among community members about their projects.

Cities that experimented with models of co-creation and co-working with community partners cultivated deeper relationships and saw more effective project outcomes for the community end-users. However, co-creating requires intensive transparency and communication from all parties, and particularly for city staff as they work to rebalance historically extractive power dynamics.



Photo: District Bridges

Paying Community Members

Strong and respected community leaders, or small groups of community leaders, often have a significant positive impact on both project development and delivery. The power of an effective community champion cannot be overstated, but it is critical to reward these leaders for their time and truly position them as a project lead. Government agencies have historically put extractive pressure on community groups to donate time, and cities must work to discontinue this model.

City agencies can recognize the value of strong community champions and leaders by paying them fairly for their time. This could mean paying community members to run and maintain the project site, paying residents to run individualized outreach programs that inform project development, and/or paying community partners to lead events. This also means not underpaying community members — their rate should not be discounted compared to other consultants the city may hire. Likewise, when cities do not meet their community's needs or expectations, it is important to understand how that can erode trust between community leaders and their neighbors. City staff should remain transparent and accountable to these community leaders before, during, and after project implementation.



Photo: The Rosewood Initiative

Making the Case

Many grant recipients leveraged grant funding to demonstrate the successes and benefits of working closely with community partners. They did so by:

- Documenting projects with high quality before and after photos,
- Creating videos of the events and implementations, and
- Gathering quotes and survey data about how communities experienced and engaged with these projects, before, during and after implementation.

Some grant recipients have already successfully made the case to continue their project in the future, including allocating staff time or agency funds for another year of the project. The grant projects also helped some community partners gain dedicated staff resources for similar work in the future. And other grant recipients are preparing materials from these projects to make the case internally that their agencies should bring this community partnership model into more of the agency's programs.

Cities can leverage quick-build projects (and external funding) to demonstrate the power of working closely with community partners. These partnerships should not be a one-time effort for a single project, but should grow with the city agency's processes. Cities can demonstrate the value of these project models with thorough documentation and continued open communication with community members.



Photo: District Bridges

