Bow to Bluff

Process Guide

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Bow to Bluff Process Guide

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The Bow to Bluff Process Guide

The Bow to Bluff Process Guide describes the citizen-led initiative to transform the Bow to Bluff corridor into a great public space. The guide not only details what happened during the project, but also explains the project parameters, processes, and the people involved.

This document is meant to serve as a project review and a guide to future engagement initiatives. It will be useful to City Council, City administration, community associations, citizen groups, urban designers, and anyone who is interested in public engagement, placemaking, and public space.

The process guide is split into two major sections. The Executive Summary gives an overview of the engagement process and highlights its innovations and successes. The Summary also contains a list of recommendations to the City to build on the success of this initiative and to use the Bow to Bluff model to improve public engagement.

The rest of the document explains how the Bow to Bluff “engagement experiment” was defined, planned and executed by a small group of dedicated citizens and key supporters. The project is broken down into its components to help readers learn from and hopefully build on the Bow to Bluff experience.

This process guide was produced by the Bow to Bluff Resources and Planning Committee (B2B RPC) and is available for downloading from the website (bowtobluff.org). Please direct any questions or feedback to Tamara Lee at microbe@picolina.net.
**Executive Summary**

**Project Overview**

**Bow to Bluff** is an independent, citizen-led initiative to transform the public corridor along the Sunnyside LRT line between the Bow River and McHugh Bluff into a great public space. Bow to Bluff is pioneering an innovative model of citizen-based engagement for Calgary that is positive, collaborative and inclusive of all stakeholders.

The Bow to Bluff partnership of volunteers is supported by the Great Public Spaces (GPS) group of CivicCamp, the Hillhurst-Sunnyside Community Association (HSCA), and the City of Calgary. The project was funded by a grant from the Council Innovation Fund.

In the fall of 2011, we ran a large-scale ‘experiment’ attracting thousands of stakeholders to reimagine the Bow to Bluff corridor over seven weeks of engagement, co-design, and placemaking activities. There were two main goals: to produce a design framework primarily from citizen input rather than City or designer expertise, and to test our ideas for a citizen-based engagement process. These two goals are embodied in two major documents and a set of recommendations to the City:

- the **Bow to Bluff Design Framework**, an overall set of broad design guidelines for future development of the public corridor;
- the **Bow to Bluff Process Guide**, a description of the Bow to Bluff approach, learnings, and ‘bright ideas’ for potentially transforming public engagement;
- “**How the City can build on the success of the Bow to Bluff initiative**”, a set of specific recommendations to the City based on our experience (in the Process Guide).

“The end result has been one of the most successful place-based engagement processes in Calgary’s history.”  —O2 Planning + Design Inc.

Bow to Bluff engaged over 2500 people in just seven weeks, collecting 2000+ ideas for transforming the public space. We held regular storefront hours, created 25 different events, and organized many activities in the corridor.

Bow to Bluff attracted citywide interest, targeting every stakeholder group that uses or is affected by the corridor including pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, commuters, residents, visitors, seniors, students, and children (see **Appendix: City Map**). Bow to Bluff reached out to the Ward 7 office, the Office of the Mayor and relevant City departments such as Transit, Parks and Planning, as well as the HSCA, area developers, local businesses, and the BRZ. The project also gained support from organizations such as CivicCamp, Sustainable Calgary, the Federation of Calgary Communities (FCC), the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary, Bike Calgary, Bike Bike, 3 Things for Calgary, and the urban design community.

Although the Bow to Bluff engagement was a success on many levels, the essential result was that most people felt they’d been given a fair opportunity to be consulted in the planning stage of a community revitalization project.

“A level of trust was built with the public so that people felt like they [could] provide input and that someone was listening.”  —Ward 7 Office
A new model for citizen-centered engagement

By clearly defining the potential for transforming both a public space and the public engagement process, Bow to Bluff was awarded a Council Innovation grant. This funding provided for professional design, facilitation, and communications support, a storefront/working space in the corridor, and resources for large-scale events and engagement activities.

With this support, Bow to Bluff was able to demonstrate a new model for place-based engagement that is not only collaborative and consultative, but also productive, efficient, and cost-effective. The challenge was to facilitate a positive conversation between all interested stakeholders about creating a great public space. The innovation was to initiate this conversation as a group of “citizens consulting citizens”, rather than waiting for the City to “do something about fixing the corridor”.

By acting as a neutral third party, Bow to Bluff was able to build bridges between the City and citizens in a compressed time frame. We were entrusted with the job of creating a safe, respectful and fun space for this conversation to blossom into a real public consultation.

“Public engagement was truly innovative….the public driving the public engagement.” — City Parks

Components of the Bow to Bluff model included:

- An independent, proactive group of volunteer citizens, with a balance of community association (CA) and non-CA members on the Bow to Bluff Resources and Planning committee (B2B RPC)
- Partnership with the CA, ward office, and relevant City staff (the ward office administered the funding, the CA acted as the financial and insuring agent)
- Funding that provided for staff, the storefront/working space, supplies, and other resources
- A dedicated storefront/working space in the study area
- A team of paid consultants supporting the engagement strategy
- A team of design students and community volunteers supporting the storefront
- A relentless campaign of communications and creative engagement activities that ran (online and in real-time) in parallel with the information-gathering and co-design processes
- City-wide stakeholders interested in the Bow to Bluff corridor

The high interest and large number of Bow to Bluff participants signals a desire for real civic engagement on the design of public spaces. The success of this project should encourage people to think beyond the typical ‘grassroots activist / single issue’ model, and the City to think beyond the traditional ‘design presentation / open house’ model.

“[At first, it] was all about the design guide…but our process—a citizen-centered placemaking exercise—is in fact unique to Calgary, [and may be] the most important outcome of the project.” — B2B RPC
Factors for success

“The stars were in alignment for this project.” — B2B RPC

The definition of what makes a city most livable now includes sustainability. The big shift to more sustainable municipal development in Calgary (City Centre Plan, Plan It, Transit-Oriented Development) and a rising interest in civic engagement and innovation in city planning are the big factors that made the Bow to Bluff initiative possible.

Other factors that contributed to Bow to Bluff’s success:

- **People.** The B2B RPC and the support team had a large capacity, diverse professional skills, and a ‘can do’ entrepreneurial attitude. The top tier designers truly allowed citizen input to drive the design. The Alderman, ward office, Office of the Mayor, key City staff, and the community association were all willing to support—and learn from—ordinary people. And the ‘ordinary people’, from ages 8 to 80, were full of great ideas.

- **Space.** The B2B RPC met and worked regularly in a large, private space dedicated to the project and adjacent to the corridor. The old Ant Hill building, which housed the engagement process, was also located next to the corridor, with high visibility and high traffic on the main street.

- **Time.** Now is the ideal time to transform the corridor into a great public space. The corridor runs through an inner-city neighbourhood, with significant redevelopment along its length already underway: Transit’s LRT station upgrades, McHugh Bluff access improvements, the Battistella condominium development, the warehouse demolition, and the 2nd Avenue street enhancements.

- **Location.** Because of its location and connectivity, the Bow to Bluff corridor has enormous potential to transform into a major pedestrian and cycling connector interspersed with attractive and active public spaces, both urban and natural.

- **Resources.** Council voted unanimously to award the project $150,000 in innovation funding. The B2B RPC dedicated hundreds of volunteer hours, working space and supplies to the project. The support team discounted their rates and also worked many pro bono hours. Volunteers staffed the storefront and events.

What did we learn overall?

We learned a lot about Calgarians during the Bow to Bluff project. People really do want to be heard, consulted, and engaged in civic life. Initially, we’d hoped for maybe 500 citizens, mostly residents, to offer some input. Instead, we were overwhelmed with more than five times the expected numbers of participants offering thousands of bright ideas, thoughtful observations, smart suggestions, and local knowledge.

“Thanks for asking.” — feedback from several participants

We discovered that the City and citizens really do want to work together in a positive, productive way. Framing the relationship between all stakeholders as an ongoing ‘conversation’ was an opportunity to learn to work out differences. Citizens didn’t always understand the many layers of a
design problem, or know quite how to frame their feedback. The City didn’t always understand how to ask the right questions or deal with issues. Bow to Bluff, as the independent ‘honest broker’, was able to build trust between all stakeholders by providing a creative, well-organized space for collaboration to happen.

Even perceived crises in the corridor turned out to be opportunities. Taking advantage of Transit’s plans to upgrade the Sunnyside LRT station with a four-car platform and new power substation, we quickly organized two workshops and an open house to solicit public input. When the stairs were accidentally removed from McHugh Bluff, we immediately set up a discussion between City Parks and the affected communities. In both cases, citizens felt they’d been consulted; Parks and Transit staff appreciated our help engaging stakeholders.

“This is the best public engagement event that I have ever attended, and I have been to many of them.”
— participant in the Transit workshops

What Margaret Mead said is true: A small group of thoughtful people [can] change the world. However, building the B2B RPC turned out to be as much of an experiment as the engagement itself. Starting out as a typical single-issue, grassroots group, we had to rapidly transform into a more formal, structured organization to meet City hiring policies, build the consulting team, responsibly manage the public funds, and run a tight, professional project.

The huge volunteer effort from the RPC and others may be difficult to replicate. Other groups wishing to attempt a project of similar scale will have to carefully consider and balance the amount of sweat equity required over the course of the project. In retrospect, we really needed more RPC members, volunteers, planning time, effective project management, and logistics support, as well as more clarity around team structure and the City’s expectations. In spite of our many mistakes, we were still able to create a relentless, articulate campaign of constant communication and engagement in real-time and online.

Attracting support from the City was, and will be, critical to the success of this citizen initiative. Members of the ward office and administration attended events, engaged citizens, and championed the project within the City. We are working with the City to move forward into the implementation phase, as well as continuing to improve public engagement.

Having space was also important. Without project space—the conveniently located, attractive storefront for the engagement, or the dedicated working space for the steering committee—Bow to Bluff would not have been nearly as successful as it was. Also, we discovered that ‘space’ as in creating great public space is something that excited everyone who participated in Bow to Bluff.

Bow to Bluff is only the first experiment to improve the process of citizen engagement for great public spaces. We hope that both the City and other citizen initiatives learn from our experiences and adopt the Bow to Bluff approach.

“Everyone wants to create great public spaces in a livable city, but to replicate the Bow to Bluff engagement process [will take] a lot of energy, innovation, and citizen/volunteer buy-in to build the vision, design and prioritize, and find ways to implement it.”
— O2 Planning + Design
How the City can build on the success of the Bow to Bluff initiative
Resources and Planning Committee (RPC), Bow to Bluff initiative

The Bow to Bluff initiative, funded by a Council Innovation Fund grant, was a “rather wildly successful” experiment to improve public engagement. With City support, this small, independent citizen group ran an innovative one-month engagement process, which attracted 2500 people who contributed over 2000 ideas on how to make the Bow to Bluff corridor into a great public space.

Reflecting on what we learned from this project, we believe that the City has an unusual opportunity to build on the Bow to Bluff success. We’d respectfully like to make the following recommendations:

1. **Adopt the Bow to Bluff Design Framework**

   Bow to Bluff has successfully debuted a new model for positive, collaborative engagement, with unprecedented citizen response, and unqualified support from the co-design team. We ask that City Administration review the Bow to Bluff Design Framework and that City Council approve the Framework as the basis for improving the public realm of the Bow to Bluff corridor over time.

   **Recommendation #1**: That City Council adopt the Bow to Bluff Design Framework and incorporate key elements into the Hillhurst-Sunnyside Area Redevelopment Plan when the ARP is next updated.

2. **Begin improving the Bow to Bluff corridor as a great public space**

   We ask that the City continue to work with all stakeholders to identify specific implementation opportunities, funding sources, and the ‘next steps’ to making the corridor into a great public space. The Design Framework contains a list of incremental implementation projects that can be prioritized, implemented (as funding allows), and monitored to begin to realize the citizen-driven vision for Bow to Bluff.

   **Recommendation #2a**: That the City work with citizens to prioritize the project list in the Design Framework, and actively support citizen initiatives to secure funding for selected projects to incrementally improve the Bow to Bluff corridor.

   **Recommendation #2b**: That the City work with other stakeholders such as area developers, local businesses, and organizations to support and fund small scale, citizen-led projects and placemaking activities in the Bow to Bluff corridor. This will both activate the public space, and build on the innovative engagement process between the City, citizens, and the business community.
**Recommendation #2c:** That the City expedite a simple, streamlined process to permit citizen-initiated placemaking activities and public space experiments to create a lively public realm in the Bow to Bluff corridor and beyond.

3. **Inspire and support more citizen-led initiatives like Bow to Bluff**

The tremendous success of Bow to Bluff was made possible through Council innovation funding and the enthusiastic support of our ward office and several City departments.

The City could develop a *citizen-led engagement support program*, based on what worked well in the Bow to Bluff model. This program could inspire and support other citizen groups to launch their own community engagement initiatives, and help bring together all stakeholders, including the relevant City departments, CAs, BRZs, developers, and organizations, as well as citizens.

Furthermore, the City could allow citizen-led initiatives to use local, unused spaces, in the same way the City-owned Ant Hill building was made available for the Bow to Bluff engagement.

**Recommendation #3a:** That the City create a new program for initiatives like Bow to Bluff which would fund citizen-led engagement projects to improve neighbourhoods, and provide a City point-of-contact (liaison) to facilitate City involvement and support.

**Recommendation #3b:** That the City work with citizens, area developers, local businesses, and organizations to permit and fund small scale, citizen-led projects and placemaking activities to activate great public spaces all over Calgary.

**Recommendation #3c:** That the City allow temporary use of under-utilized City-owned buildings and public spaces for citizen-led initiatives and other community placemaking activities.

4. **Continue to develop the new model for citizen-based engagement**

The Bow to Bluff Process Guide not only describes what we did and what worked, but also what we learned, what we could have done better, and ‘bright ideas’ for next time.

The City could benefit by establishing a generalized set of engagement principles and approaches for other citizen-led projects distilled from our experience. These principles could be useful both to citizens in the engagement support program suggested above (#3), and to the City itself in its own internal engagement processes.

**Recommendation #4a:** That the City use and distribute the Bow to Bluff Process Guide as an example and learning tool to staff, community associations, and citizen groups who want to run a similar engagement process.

**Recommendation #4b:** That the City establish a general framework for citizen-led, collaborative engagement as the model for its engagement support program (the “Bow to Bluff Engagement Model”).
5. Plan ahead for future collaborative engagement opportunities

The very first Bow to Bluff poster showed a map of the corridor and described upcoming development projects along its length. Many people, including members of the RPC and design team, got involved with this project because they could see that the area would undergo significant change in the next few years and because they could see the enormous potential to transform the corridor into a major connector and a great public space. Furthermore, we were able to work collaboratively with the City on specific areas of the corridor—for example, with Transit on the Sunnyside LRT station improvements, and with Parks on the McHugh Bluff ‘missing stairs’ access.

Creating maps of neighbourhoods which highlight City infrastructure improvements two or three years in advance could inform and inspire future citizen-led initiatives like Bow to Bluff to work with their ward offices and relevant City departments to ensure coordinated, effective community engagement.

Recommendation #5: That the City develop a set of up-to-date, web-based maps that show all expected City infrastructure projects planned and approved for the next two or three years by district, and make these maps accessible to not only internal departments but also citizen initiatives, community associations, designers, and developers to identify opportunities and facilitate better integrated and collaborative planning, engagement, and co-design.
Answering the Big Questions

How successful was Bow to Bluff?

Initially, we’d hoped to attract up to 500 people to offer some input to improve the public corridor. By the end of seven weeks, we’d been inundated with ~2200 ideas from over 2500 people; the walls of the storefront were literally covered in sticky notes, maps, design sketches, and drawings. We discovered that citizens really want to be heard, consulted and engaged in civic life. When we explained to a hundred school children that their input would be seriously considered for the Bow to Bluff design, they generated over 800 ideas!

Participants were not limited to local residents; Bow to Bluff attracted city-wide interest, as well as involvement from HSCA, CivicCamp, Ward 7 Office, Office of the Mayor, City administration (Parks and Transit in particular, but also other departments like Roads, Transportation, Planning, Corporate Housing), Federation of Calgary Communities, and EVDS at the University of Calgary. The engagement process generated a strong feeling of ownership by the RPC, volunteers, and participants. We were able to extend the engagement process to help communities like Rosedale (McHugh Bluff access) and non-resident commuters (Transit LRT station improvements).

The storefront and design workshops attracted nearly 550 people; twenty-five stakeholder events drew nearly 1000 people; altogether, storefront visitors produced over 1300 ideas. The sounding boards in the corridor garnered over 900 feedback sticky notes. These figures do not include all the people we talked to at community events such as Sun ‘n Salsa, Bow River Flow, Jane’s Walk, Sunnyside School Fall Fair, or the weekly HSCA Farmers’ Markets. Also, online, the B2B website attracted 2300 unique visitors and 3700 hits in total.

“We all have a need and a desire for public space that gives pleasure.”
— Alain de Botton, The Architecture of Happiness

How was success measured?

We tracked the number of people who visited the storefront, and the number of participants attending each event. Visitors placed sticky dots on a large Calgary map to denote their home neighbourhoods, clearly showing the project attracted citywide interest.

We reached out to every stakeholder group we could think of with specifically targeted events and activities, as well as traditional and online communication. We also evaluated the quantity and sources of citizen input from the storefront, workshops, events, and sounding boards (for details, see Events). Email sign-up numbers, website hit counts, Facebook ‘likes’, Twitter ‘tweets’, and anecdotal evidence from participants, residents, and volunteers demonstrated that we were able to create a positive buzz around public engagement that attracted people.

The results of the engagement process—the Design Framework, Process Guide, and Recommendations—continue to interest citizens and the City. Success will eventually be measured by whether citizen-generated design concepts are implemented and if the Bow to Bluff approach is used to improve public engagement in general.
How can the Bow to Bluff approach be used to improve public engagement?

The Bow to Bluff Process Guide is meant to be a learning tool for citizens, community associations, and the City, to take what they find useful from our experience and apply it to other projects.

We hope that other citizen groups and City staff build on and refine this first experiment to eventually generate a set of general principles for collaborative, citizen-based engagement. (See Recommendations #4a, 4b from “How the City can build on the success of the Bow to Bluff initiative”).

How can the City encourage and support similar citizen initiatives?

We recommend that a general set of engagement principles based on the Bow to Bluff approach be combined with an engagement support program to fund and guide similar citizen-led initiatives. (See Recommendation #3a).

Our other suggestions include: simplifying policies to encourage placemaking activities in public space; allowing the temporary use of under-utilized City-owned properties; and partnering with local businesses, developers, and citizens to activate public spaces. (See Recommendations #2c, 3b, 3c).

Ordinary citizens, including members of the RPC and design team, got involved with Bow to Bluff because they saw the very first, simple map of the area which described the various development projects happening along the length of the corridor. If citizens can access maps of their neighbourhoods that show all upcoming developments planned for the next few years, then they too might be inspired to organize engagement projects similar to this one. (See Recommendation #5).

“People were so interested in the process—maybe more interested in the process than the outcome.”
— Bow to Bluff RPC

How can other citizens initiate similar engagement projects?

★ Read the Bow to Bluff Process Guide, learn from our experience, and apply whatever is useful to your particular engagement project. ★ Talk to the B2B RPC members and City staff who got Bow to Bluff up and running. ★ Develop a poster with a map of the study area and a clear description of the engagement opportunity. ★ Find out what’s happening in terms of development in your neighbourhood in the next few years. ★ Form an action group by inviting not only your neighbours, but also anyone who might be interested in your study area, placemaking or great public spaces (for example, Bow to Bluff attracted cycling groups, gardeners, landscape architects, elementary students, historians, artists, City Parks and Transit staff, etc). ★ Plan carefully but be flexible and adaptable to take advantage of unexpected opportunities. ★ Develop working relationships with your ward office and relevant City departments. ★ Invite community associations, local organizations, businesses and developers to support your initiative. ★ Use everything from sidewalk chalk to Facebook, from posters to tweets, to promote your project and attract participants, volunteers and support. ★ Find meeting space for the engagement process—if possible, in your study area. ★ Encourage the City to develop an engagement support program. ★ Support the recommendations in “How the City can build on the success of the Bow to Bluff initiative”.

★
How do we take Bow to Bluff from engagement and design to implementation?

To many people, success will ultimately be judged by whether citizen-generated design concepts are implemented as physical improvements to the Bow to Bluff corridor.

“Without clear implementation activities, we run the risk of deep community disappointment and/or being accused of [merely] throwing an expensive ‘block party’.”

— O2 Planning + Design

Our next steps are to ask the City to adopt the Bow to Bluff Design Framework, to help prioritize the project list, and to help secure funding for selected improvement projects. We are also asking the City and other partners such as local businesses, organizations or developers to support small scale, citizen-led projects and placemaking activities to activate the existing public spaces. (See Recommendations #1, 2a, 2b).

A portion of the Bow to Bluff grant and a developers’ levy may provide some initial investment for an improvement project, and/or seed money to leverage more funding and community involvement. There is also discussion about forming a “Friends of Bow to Bluff” society to develop a long term fundraising strategy, and inspire citizen involvement in the form of placemaking activities or small-scale projects in the public space.

“[Even] if nothing else happens, the Bow to Bluff engagement was still a great success.”

— City Urban Design and Heritage
Background

A Short (but Intense!) History of Bow to Bluff

Local residents have long been concerned about the tenuous pathways and shabby pocket parks along the Sunnyside LRT tracks. Various individuals tried over many years to make the public spaces safer and more attractive, but before Bow to Bluff, there was no coordinated effort between the City and citizens.

After organizing two community tours of the pathway in early 2011, a small group of independent citizens decided to ask users of the pathway for ideas to improve it. We developed a poster to present to the HSCA Vitalization committee, Ward 7 Alderman Farrell, and the Great Public Spaces group of CivicCamp (see Appendix: Bow to Bluff poster). Enough interest was generated within and beyond the local community, and at the City, that Alderman Farrell sponsored our application for a Council Innovation Fund grant (see Appendix: CIF grant).

We wanted to engage people in an innovative, collaborative process to re-imagine the entire public corridor that runs from Memorial Drive to McHugh Bluff. We proposed running a citizen-led, month-long engagement process with placemaking activities onsite (see Project Overview). We also wanted to include all stakeholders: not just local residents, but also pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, visitors, businesses, shoppers, seniors, students, City administration, local developers, and anyone interested in urban design, placemaking, and great public spaces.

Receiving a CIF grant

To everyone’s astonishment, in late May, City Council voted unanimously to grant the Bow to Bluff initiative $150,000 to run a groundbreaking experiment to improve the public engagement process and produce a set of citizen-generated design concepts. The City hoped that our citizen-led, placemaking process could serve as an inspiration and blueprint for similar projects citywide. At this point, we didn’t know if our proposal would even work for our small study area, let alone be replicable.

When we heard we’d been awarded an innovation grant, we immediately realized that: (a) we had to be accountable for public funding; (b) we had to somehow engage City administration as stakeholders, as well as citizens; (c) we were on the hook for a major design document and a detailed ‘best practices’ process report, and; (d) we had to create an organized, professional identity in person and online.

What took us several months to realize, however, was that: (a) once we accepted taxpayers’ money, we could no longer be a single-issue, grassroots group; (b) although the Ward 7 Office was very helpful, we needed a strategy and perhaps a “City liaison” to effectively engage City Council and key administrators; (c) we were far more focused on the engagement process (short term) than the deliverables and implementation (long term), and; (d) we really needed twice the amount of volunteers and support to accomplish our rather ambitious goals for engagement, events, communications, and design.

“It was almost as if we were building a small start-up company that had to have a financial, legal, business, and governing structure—but [unlike entrepreneurs,] we’d never get paid.”

—B2B RPC
Prototyping the B2B engagement process

Three days after receiving the CIF grant, we had another surprise. City Transit presented the perfect opportunity to jump in and prototype our engagement process. Transit was on a tight deadline to design and implement a new power traction substation and four-car platform expansion at Sunnyside LRT station. They needed community input right away, in order to finalize their designs by mid-summer, and asked Bow to Bluff to help (see Project Opportunities).

In less than three weeks, we organized the first Transit workshop where a small but diverse group of citizens worked with key Transit staff and designers in an intense brainstorming session. This workshop was such a successful and enjoyable collaboration that Transit asked Bow to Bluff to organize a second design workshop and an open house. Citizens who attended these engagement events were pleased to be not only heard, but also consulted, and even more pleased to see the designs evolve in response to their feedback.

Getting organized

Initially there was excitement but also some confusion around the funding and who was in charge of what. We tried to make it clear that Bow to Bluff was an independent citizen initiative supported by the City and HSCA, but not a City-owned process or a CA-run project. Fortunately, the RPC was balanced with HSCA and non-CA members, residents and non-local citizens. We produced a mission statement and FAQ to clarify who we were, what we were doing, and what the money would be used for. We also started promoting the project at community events, such as Jane’s Walk, Sun ‘n Salsa, Sunnyside Fall Fair, HSCA Farmers’ Market, and Harvest Festival.

Over the summer, we reformulated our informal group into a more structured organization, called the Bow to Bluff Resources and Planning Committee (B2B RPC). We had to clearly distinguish between RPC volunteers and the paid support team, to avoid conflict-of-interest issues when hiring contractors with public funding. We had to define a transparent, accountable process for handling the funding through the ward office with HSCA acting as our financial agent, to comply with City requirements. We also secured the old Ant Hill building with help from the Ward Office under the HSCA’s insurance policy, and started planning the engagement project in earnest. (See Project Parameters).

“In retrospect, it looks like we planned the whole thing. But really, we were flying by the seat of our pants most of the time, with a huge amount of support from other people.”

—B2B RPC

Hiring the support team

In order to hire contractors for the project, the City required us to run an open competition for paid positions to conform to standard hiring policy. Due to Transit’s time constraints, we sole-sourced a facilitator. After the Transit workshops, we kept the facilitator to manage the engagement process and the designers we expected to hire right away. However, the City wanted us to go through a formal but simplified RFP/EOI (Request for Proposal / Expression of Interest) process and advertise for the rest of the team (see RFP and Hiring Process).
Accordingly, we wrote two RFPs, one for a team of urban designers, and one for a communications-logistics adjutant, and posted them widely for two weeks (see Appendix: RFPs). To our amazement, we received ten serious design proposals, several from high profile firms, and seventeen applicants for the adjutant position! After an intense week of reviewing, evaluating, shortlisting, interviewing, and negotiating, we hired the professional support team in late August. Each B2B RPC volunteer then took on specific responsibilities and support staff in the following areas: finance/budgeting, communications, engagement/events, liaising with the City and HSCA. (See Project People).

Running the engagement process

After only a few weeks of preparation, we launched the Bow to Bluff citizen-centered, place-based engagement process at the end of September. Over seven weeks, we engaged thousands of stakeholders, using a combination of open storefront, installation sounding boards, targeted events, co-design workshops, and traditional and online promotion.

The storefront was open regular hours, and staffed with volunteers to explain the project and encourage visitors to add their ideas. Four large boards with sticky notes, area maps, and pens were installed in the corridor to solicit input from commuters, cyclists, and other passersby right onsite. We ran twenty-five events to attract different stakeholder groups, such as children, seniors, youth leaders, cyclists, designers, university students, affected residents, community associations, and City administration. We also organized two intensive co-design sessions, open houses, and design presentations. All Bow to Bluff activities and progress were promoted and reported online and realtime, using everything from posters and news outlets, to websites and social media, to sidewalk chalk and cupcakes. (See Project Processes for details).

“To put this into context, the Plan It Calgary initiative…engaged over 7000 citizens in about two years. In only [a month and a half], Bow to Bluff has engaged [over] 2000 citizens.”
—Intelligent Futures

Developing the design from citizen input

The comprehensive, collaborative engagement approach resulted in over 2200 citizen-generated ideas for transforming the Bow to Bluff corridor into a great public space. The project design team actively participated in the engagement process, attending stakeholder events and presenting at City meetings.

After carefully considering all stakeholder input, the designers produced a set of design themes and problem statements. The problem statements were then used to focus teams of citizen participants to brainstorm potential solutions at two major co-design workshops (DESIGN and REFINE the DESIGN) held in November. The designers also held workshops with a cross-section of different City departments to allow City administrators to review citizen-generated design solutions as they evolved.
Producing the project deliverables

Once the citizen engagement process wrapped up in early December, the designers from O2 Planning + Design worked with the B2B RPC, Ward 7 Office, and City administration to further develop the overall design concepts for the corridor. The Bow to Bluff Design Framework was finalized at the beginning of April 2012.

The B2B RPC also worked with the ward office, the Office of the Mayor, and City administrators to produce this document: a description of the Bow to Bluff engagement approach, learnings and ‘bright ideas’, as well as a set of recommendations to City Council. The Bow to Bluff Process Guide was published in early June 2012.

What’s next?

The Bow to Bluff RPC will present the Bow to Bluff Design Framework, the Bow to Bluff Process Guide, and our recommendations to City Council in early July 2012. We also hope to start working on selected small projects to start implementation, and look for funding, partnerships, and other support.

Much of the activity we predicted along the corridor a year ago is underway now. As of mid-April 2012, Transit has started to implement the four-car platform extension, new power traction substation, and park improvements at the Sunnyside LRT station. The old warehouse on 2nd Avenue and 9A Street has been demolished: the site has been leveled and seeded with grass, and the north end is temporarily being used by Transit to store construction materials and equipment for the LRT station upgrade. The temporary access for McHugh Bluff, a gravel zig-zag pathway, has been built as promised by Parks.

Because significant redevelopment along the public corridor is now underway, there is a tremendous and timely opportunity for citizens to reclaim and rebuild it into a great public place. More than ever, the Bow to Bluff corridor has enormous potential to transform into a major pedestrian and cycling connector interspersed with attractive and active public spaces.
Project Parameters

Although it was easy to define the study area and our overall goal of citizen-centered engagement, setting other project parameters such as the scope, timeline, and resources proved a bit more challenging.

The very first Bow to Bluff poster published in February 2011 clearly delineated the location of the study area of interest, its current problems, and the significant redevelopment planned for the area. The poster also described the potential for transforming the corridor into a great public space, and identified a general opportunity for citizens to work with the City (see Appendix: B2B Poster). Our initial mission statement made it clear that Bow to Bluff was an independent citizen initiative that wanted to partner with the community association (HSCA) and the City.

When we applied for and were awarded the CIF grant, we refined our overall project goals. We decided to focus on developing an innovative engagement process, but not implementation activities; concentrating on the public realm, but not private development (land use or other issues); soliciting citizen input to drive the initial direction and concepts, but not the final integrated design; and producing both a design framework and a ‘best practices’ guide as project deliverables.

Project scope

Initially, we proposed a 2-4 week ‘storefront engagement’ process with regular open hours and a few events, staffed by a facilitator and 1-2 junior designers. We hoped to somehow attract perhaps 400-500 citizens and the City to participate in placemaking and co-design activities.

The scope expanded when several top design companies submitted extensive proposals in response to our RFP—their innovative ideas and expertise inspired us to “think bigger”. When the support team grew to seven people, we decided to run a solid month of storefront engagement, hold more open hours, target events to stakeholder groups, install sounding boards in the corridor, and develop a strategy to engage key City administrators.

The scope ballooned during the actual engagement phase, partly due to a lack of detailed planning and project team management, and partly because RPC members ended up managing and implementing much of the on-the-ground operations rather than simply providing high level direction and support. The scope also expanded due to unexpected developments such as the accidental removal of the stairs from McHugh Bluff or the appearance of bike lanes on 10th Street that prompted us to offer topic-specific engagement opportunities (see Project Opportunities). Some issues were identified as out-of-scope, and taken by back to the community association by RPC CA-members.

BRIGHT IDEA: Devote a full-day meeting during the planning phase, just to determine the project framework, scope, goals and milestones, as well as roles, responsibilities and governing structure for the team.

The involvement of the City administration also influenced the project scope. For example, citizens generated a profusion of ideas to improve the largest ‘triangle park’ along the corridor (the old warehouse site). During the engagement process, the City’s perspective on the site changed our view of it from being “in scope” to “out of scope” to “potentially in scope for interim but not long term use”. Also, people had ideas to redesign the entire site, while the City wanted to limit the scope to the interface of the public realm to the long term development (affordable housing). Using the Bow to Bluff approach, we were able to begin a conversation between the City and citizens about this critical component of the corridor.
Other developments were “partly in scope”, such as Transit’s LRT station improvements, which were already designed and funded before this project, or completely “out of scope”, such as the private Battistella development on 2nd Avenue and 9A Street. In the case of Transit, we helped organize a successful citizen engagement process to review their designs. In the case of Battistella, we engaged the developer in conversation about the public realm around his project; the response has been a contribution toward improving the corridor and an offer to sponsor placemaking activities.

BRIGHT IDEA: What you leave out of your scope is as important as what is in your scope.

Some people felt the overall scope was well-defined but not the details, others felt there was ‘total scope confusion’, but probably most would agree that we were too ambitious, given the tight timeline and limited resources. On the other hand, this pilot project was hugely successful, engaging over 2500 people in seven weeks, generating 2000+ ideas for transforming the public space; holding 25 different events and regular storefront hours, attracting city-wide interest, and demonstrating a new model for citizen-centered engagement.

In retrospect, we needed to spend more time planning the project—in particular, defining the scope, goals and milestones; consolidating the team; promoting the engagement process and gaining community trust; and focusing not just on planning the engagement phase, but also on producing the design framework and other project deliverables.

**Project timeline**

The original timeline proposed in the CIF application was very simplistic:

1. Project Start-up: assemble team, create marketing plan, collect data and mapping (May 2011)
2. Citizen Engagement: coordinate conversation café, design charrette, outreach (Jun–Sep 2011)
3. Design Development: develop a Design Initiative document to capture the engagement and inform a design development plan to be created by City business units (eg, Parks, Transportation) (Oct 2011)
4. Evaluation and Reporting: conduct a ‘best practices’ review for future projects (Nov 2011)
5. Information Session / Open House: report back to community (Dec 2011)
6. Implementation: financing for the public realm improvements (TBD)

Although we ended up with a far more complex timeline and milestones, we did wrap up the engagement process with an open house in December 2011, as originally predicted. Our actual high-level timeline looks more like this:

1. CIF grant awarded by unanimous vote of Council; formation of B2B RPC (May 2011)
3. Hiring the support team: RFPs, evaluation and hiring process (Jul–Aug 2011)
4. Planning phase: planning the engagement and design processes; stakeholder analysis; communications and funding release strategies; securing the project space (Sep 2011)
5. Engagement phase: storefront engagement; stakeholder events; installation sounding boards; City engagement; co-design workshops; open houses; online and real-time communications; logistics and coordination; finances, funding and budget (Oct–Nov 2011)
6. Design phase: project planning; data gathering; citizen engagement; co-design sessions (citizens) and presentations (City); design development (Sep–Nov 2011)

7. Information session / Open House: report back to the community (Dec 2011)

8. Deliverables phase: producing the Bow to Bluff Design Framework (design team); producing the Bow to Bluff Process Guide (RPC); developing recommendations to City Council (RPC, City) (Jan–~May 2012)

9. Presentation of the Bow to Bluff project: to City committees (TBA ~Jun 2012); to City Council (TBA ~Jul 2012); to the public (TBA)

**Project resources: money, time**

Because funding for Bow to Bluff came from the Council Innovation Fund and was awarded to an essentially grassroots citizen group, there was no precedent for releasing or handling the money. The B2B RPC members who were also HSCA board members worked out an allocation and tracking process, whereby the Ward 7 Office released funds at intervals to HSCA, which acted as the project’s financial agent.

HSCA provided the bank account and accounting services; the RPC handled timesheets, cheques, expenses, budgeting, signing authority, funding release, and the final accounting report. HSCA also provided the insurance coverage needed to rent the old Ant Hill building as our storefront. The community association received a small percentage of the funds in compensation for these services.

On one level, our invoice/payment process was well defined and effective; we had two people able to approve invoices and expense reimbursement required receipts. However, because HSCA had a different payment cycle and the accountant’s priority was, of course, HSCA, there were a few bumps with short term tracking and payment delays. Also, team members had to occasionally bill large expenditures to their business credit cards and wait for repayment. In retrospect, we could have used better budget and expenditure tracking tools, as well as a purchasing order/invoice process.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** Institute weekly or bi-weekly reporting with the financial agent (accountant) to keep the project treasurer and the City up to date on the budget.

Due to a lack of clarity between the RPC and the City, budget priorities tended to shift during the project. For example, we initially allocated nearly all the funding to the engagement and co-design process; later on, the City decided to hold back $30,000 toward a small ‘debut’ implementation project.

We also had to correct some misperceptions in the community about the purpose of the funding and the terms of reference of the innovation grant. We had to clarify that Bow to Bluff was not an HSCA project, but an independent citizen initiative partnering with the City and the CA.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** Be very clear about who is in charge of the funding, what the funding will be used for, and how it will be handled. Literally “holding the public trust”, your process must be transparent and accountable.
Although some City officials may have felt that the amount of funding was overgenerous, there were at least 3,128 hours of sweat equity contributed to the project. All RPC hours were volunteer, the paid team discounted their rates and added pro bono hours, and general volunteers (mostly students) of course worked for free. The designers from O2 and Intelligent Futures alone contributed 508 non-billable hours; many RPC members worked in their professional capacities for no charge (for example, producing this process guide took nearly 300 volunteer hours).

Realistic estimates of the cost of the sweat equity hours for this project come to nearly $200,000. Even most of the storefront furnishings were donated. If everything had been paid for, the project might realistically have more than doubled in cost. (See Appendix: B2B Budget).

**BRIGHT IDEA:** Due to the novelty of this pilot project, professionals cut their rates and pitched in pro bono hours. The dedicated RPC members volunteered thousands of hours. Similar initiatives will probably need at least as much donated in sweat equity as they receive in funding.
Project Processes

The simplified overall process diagram for Bow to Bluff (Nov 2010–May 2012) looks like this:

Two “space to place” tours of the Bow to Bluff corridor (Nov 2010, Jan 2011)

Presentation of B2B poster to HSCA Vitalization Committee and Ward 7 Alderman Farrell (Feb 2011)

Two Transit workshops, open house (Jun-Jul 2011)

City meeting, grant application to Council Innovation Fund (Mar-Apr 2011)

Two RFPs for design team and adjutant, project framework (Jul-Aug 2011)

CIF grant awarded by unanimous Council vote (May 2011)

Hired facilitator (Jul 2011)

City meeting, Transit-B2B prototyping opportunity, formation of B2B RPC (May 2011)

Posting RFPs, evaluating proposals, shortlisting, interviewing, hiring (Aug 2011)

RPC, support team planning processes (Sep 2011)

GRAND OPENING OF BOW TO BLUFF STOREFRONT (Oct 2011)

Storefront engagement for drop-in visitors (regular open hours)
Storefront / corridor engagement for stakeholder groups (25 special events)
Installation sounding boards for corridor users (onsite engagement)

Logistics and coordination process (RPC, support team, City, HSCA, volunteers)
Communications process (traditional, online, real-time promotion)
Design process (information-gathering, co-design, design concepts)
Financial process (funding release, budgeting, accounting)
City process (liaising, feedback, support, approvals)

Bow to Bluff Design Framework (April 2012)
Bow to Bluff Process Guide (~May 2012)
B2B Recommendations to the City (April 2012)
RFPs and Hiring Process

“My understanding of the [RPC] process used for the shortlisting [of] candidates, interviews, and final selection is [that it] is as solid a process as I have seen used by many well-organized and seasoned professional teams. Clearly the wish to make the whole process transparent and open has evoked a high level of ownership and accountability with the [RPC] team.”
—RPC advisor

After Bow to Bluff received the CIF grant and ran the engagement process for Transit, the project shifted into high gear in late July. We wanted to hire contractors right away for an early September launch to take advantage of the good weather for walk-by traffic for the storefront. We assumed that we could just quickly hire a few professionals we knew from our personal networks and get rolling.

The City agreed to let us sole-source the facilitator from the Transit engagement; however, the City auditor requested that we undergo a simplified process based on City policy to hire the rest of the support team. This meant spending a solid month writing detailed RFPs (Request for Proposals); soliciting and evaluating responses and resumés; shortlisting and interviewing candidates; and negotiating with and hiring contractors.

BRIGHT IDEA: The support team was our largest monetary expenditure. We therefore took a serious and professional approach to hiring staff with public funds in a transparent, accountable way.

We developed one RFP for designers, and another for a communications/logistics adjutant. Both RFPs clearly defined the project and its potential, background, study area, timeline, and engagement / co-design approach. The RFPs also described what we were looking for in candidates, how responses would be evaluated, our hiring budget, the response deadline, and our contact information (see Appendix: B2B RFPs).

After the Ward Office reviewed the RFPs, we posted them widely for two weeks on project tender and contracting sites (MERX, AACIP, AAA, AALA, Alberta Purchasing Connections, LinkedIn, CCVO, kijiji, craigslist), and related networks (CivicCamp, Great Public Spaces, HSCA, various Facebook pages). We expected very few bids on what we saw as a small, short-term contract.

At 5pm on the deadline date, responses started to pile up in our inbox. To everyone’s surprise, we received ten serious design proposals, several from large, well-known firms, and seventeen applicants for the adjutant position.

BRIGHT IDEA: Clearly define your project and what skills, expertise, and approach you need to support it. A clear, well-crafted, innovative RFP will likely spark thoughtful, creative, and enthusiastic responses.

We were a bit stunned that several top tier designers really wanted this small contract. Candidates told us that “the potential was so clear, we just had to bid”, “this is what you go to school for”, “we just want to work with you and learn from you”, and “projects like this are rare, a really special opportunity”.
Each design proposal had its own strengths, approach and level of understanding of citizen-centered engagement; it was difficult to choose between some of them. For two intense weeks, we reviewed, evaluated and discussed all design proposals and adjuvant résumés. We then shortlisted the top applicants and set up interviews. Our strategy included an interview protocol, set of key questions, and an evaluation matrix to make the hiring process as fair, transparent, and accountable as possible. (See Appendix: Hiring documents). After a last rigorous discussion, we made our final selection and hired the design team from O2 Planning + Design, as well as an experienced communications person.

However, the RPC hiring process was not without its problems. An early key contributor stepped down from the volunteer steering committee to apply for a paid position as a designer, but was unfortunately unsuccessful. There were criticisms from the community: the hiring process was ‘too corporate’, the RPC had ‘sold out the grassroots’, and some RPC members ‘were not qualified to judge professional design proposals’.

The criticisms were actually a good opportunity for us to clarify the hiring process. We explained that City policy required us to run an open competition to hire paid staff with public funding. We clarified that RPC volunteers who controlled the CIF grant could not themselves directly benefit from the money, as this would clearly constitute a conflict-of-interest. We defended and improved our evaluations and the matrix criteria used to shortlist and select candidates.

BRIGHT IDEA: It helps to have someone with some urban design knowledge vet design proposals, but the quality of a proposal and design team should be obvious to non-professional reviewers. A good proposal should answer these simple questions: “what can they offer this project?”, “do they have experience or success with similar projects?”, “how can they help us accomplish our goals?”, and “will they be passionate and innovative about this project?”

Before we had written the RFPs, we had decided to assign the Transit facilitator as project manager, and expected to hire a couple of independent designers. Not anticipating that experienced, professional design firms would bid as “complete teams”, we ended up with some confusion over the roles and responsibilities of team members, resulting in a lack of effective project management.

BRIGHT IDEA: Use a “one team, one contract” approach to hiring the support team. Advertise for “complete teams” with design, engagement, facilitation, and management skills built in.

Perhaps one of the most important things we learned from the RFP and hiring process is that we did not realize soon enough—which should have been the moment we accepted public funding—that we had to evolve from a typical grassroots group into a more professionally structured organization.

We also found that consensus decision-making only works if you can achieve consensus efficiently; we should have built in a voting policy and a constitution into the RPC to enable us to make difficult decisions (like those involved in the hiring process) to allow the project to move forward in a timely manner.

BRIGHT IDEA: If the City funds other citizen-led initiatives similar to Bow to Bluff, it would help to develop clear, simplified policies for the release, handling and use of public funds, hiring paid contractors, and defining conflict-of-interest guidelines.
Bow to Bluff Engagement Process

In the fall of 2011, the Bow to Bluff initiative ran a large-scale “experiment” in citizen-led, place-based engagement and co-design. For seven weeks, we invited thousands of stakeholders to re-imagine the Bow to Bluff corridor as a great public space. We held regular storefront hours and organized 25 different special events. People visited the storefront; attended events and corridor tours; saw our posters, flyers, and postcards; read the online blog, newsletter and media coverage; participated in workshops and discussions; and, most importantly, offered a multitude of ideas and suggestions.

Bow to Bluff engaged over 2500 people based on the visitor count, but the number of people aware of the project was almost certainly higher. We tracked the success of the engagement in terms of storefront visitors, citywide interest, sticky note ideas, installation board feedback, and event attendance. However, there were also hundreds of hits to our website, “likes” and “tweets”, sign-ups for the email newsletter, and postcards handed out to passersby. We also engaged people all summer before the project launched, by promoting it at Jane’s Walk, the Sun ‘n Salsa festival, Sunnyside Fall Fair, the HSCA Farmers Market, and Harvest Festival.

The public reaction to the Bow to Bluff engagement process was generally very positive. People participated because the relationship between City and citizen stakeholders was framed as a “positive, ongoing conversation” in a neutral, fun space. People also appreciated being consulted to improve a public space. One of our favourite sticky notes simply read, “Thanks for asking!”

“I feel much older now!” — an excited 9 year old stakeholder, upon learning that his ideas would be seriously considered by the project designers

We learned that attracting citizens is one thing, but getting them to give feedback is something else. We tried several different ways to encourage people to offer their ideas (see Events and Communications). We also tried to attract every stakeholder group we could think of: residents, pedestrians, cyclists, commuters, transit riders, visitors, students, children, seniors, urban designers, City administrators, developers, local organizations, and businesses.

We discovered through trial-and-error that events should always be planned with the end goal of soliciting citizen input in mind. Also, we found that high profile and stakeholder-targeted events attracted more attention (e.g., Grand Opening, Iron Sketch, student tours, DESIGN workshop) than general events like open houses.

Running the storefront took a lot of energy, but the space supported individual conversations and group discussions, which in turn generated over 1300 ideas. In contrast, setting up and maintaining the sounding boards in the corridor was relatively easy—and produced nearly 900 ideas, but no personal interactions. In terms of citizen input, we were happily overwhelmed; however, we probably could have used a better data collection process and analysis tools.

BRIGHT IDEA: Have a clear and effective strategy to manage, synthesize, and analyze citizen input.

“I think we tried everything humanly possible within the time and budgetary constraints.” — B2B RPC member
Although very successful, the engagement phase was extremely intense (see Project Scope). We felt we needed to prove the B2B model to pave the way for other citizen-led initiatives. In hindsight, the engagement period could have been limited to two or three weeks, since the bulk of useful input appeared in this timeframe. The designers also felt the engagement phase was too long and the design timeline too short. However, the RPC decided that anything less than a month of storefront hours might be seen by the public as just a ‘drive-by engagement process’. Also, some of the events that yielded the most input took the entire month to coordinate (for example, the elementary and junior/senior high school tours).

**BRIGHT IDEA:** Define what “successful engagement” means to you, and how it will be measured. Define the length of the engagement process, targeted stakeholders, number and type of events, volunteer/resource requirements, and communications strategy—then stick to your plan!

Staffing open storefront hours, running multiple events, and promoting the project for seven weeks was a tremendous amount of work, but proved that we were serious about public consultation. We were fortunate to have eager design student and community volunteers staff the storefront and events, along with the adjutant, RPC members, and the design team. One of our biggest challenges was just trying to keep up with the promoting / organizing / running / reporting cycle for the continuous flow of events and storefront activities—but overall, the engagement process was an unqualified success.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** The length of your engagement phase and how much the designers are involved with engagement (data-gathering vs. designing) may depend on your budget and volunteer capacity.

**Space, time, and other factors**

Space—in terms of being essential to project success—really is the final frontier. Having a local, dedicated work space was critical not only to the engagement process, but also to the early planning and meeting stages of the project. Bow to Bluff maintained its early independence and high productivity through regular meetings at a neutral location right next to the corridor. An RPC member donated the entire main floor of a private house as project headquarters for the year. Fondly dubbed ‘Pooh Corner’, the RPC had a large meeting, storage, and working space that was convenient and always available. Although we rented the old Ant Hill building as the storefront, Pooh Corner continued to be ‘B2B HQ’ before, during, and after the public engagement phase.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** Having a neutral working space in the study area reinforced the innovative idea of an independent citizen initiative partnering with the CA and the City on a project of city-wide interest.
The RPC met frequently in person, but also stayed in touch via email, phone calls, and texting. Such constant contact allowed us to be not only productive, but also agile and responsive to any opportunities that suddenly arose. However, internal communications between the RPC and design team, and contact with the City, should have been more consistent in hindsight. In particular, when the engagement process was in full swing, the RPC and design team were unable to meet regularly; effective decision-making suffered somewhat as a result.

BRIGHT IDEA: Develop an internal communications strategy that includes regular meetings with the design team and/or requires a designer to attend all RPC meetings.

Having Bow to Bluff occupy a prominent building in Kensington that had been mostly empty for years benefitted both the project and the community. Exciting events and workshops drew crowds to the old Ant Hill building, and attracted citywide interest. Because the storefront kept open hours for a solid month, many people dropped in more than once to look at and talk about the evolution of ideas and design concepts. Activating the building also encouraged people to see it as a community hub. After we moved out of the space, there was increased interest from other organizations to rent the building for a variety of temporary uses.

Timing was another factor in the engagement process. When the CIF grant was awarded in May, we hoped to open the storefront by early summer. The launch was postponed twice: first, because of the Transit engagement in June/July, and then, because of the RFP / hiring process in July/August. Fortunately, we managed to attract a fair number of visitors and passersby since unusually mild weather held for October and most of November. By the time it turned cold, there was enough buzz around Bow to Bluff that over 60 people showed up to the REFINE workshop on a day of minus 27°C wind-chill!

BRIGHT IDEA: Running an engagement process during good weather allows for outdoor placemaking activities right onsite. Note: avoid holidays or lull times (e.g., Hallowe'en weekend, the last week of August, Grey Cup or Stanley Cup finals) when scheduling events.

Hospitality contributed to the project’s success. From handing out cupcakes on the street, to always having a pot of coffee and treats in the storefront, to simple catering at workshops, food seemed to help facilitate the ongoing conversation. In fact, having snacks at RPC meetings became almost essential to maintaining productivity through the longest sessions.

The logistics of organizing, coordinating, and executing the storefront activities, multiple events, communications strategy, and the co-design process were shared among the entire team with mixed results. In retrospect, it probably would have been more effective if one key organizer was in charge of the storefront and event logistics.
The Bow to Bluff storefront

“The storefront was by far the most successful thing we did. People loved the concept. People even took ownership of the space….For the time it was open, it started to become a community hub. It became an ideas incubator.” — B2B RPC member

Holding a public engagement in a local storefront for a period of time, rather than the typical one day ‘open house’, is considered a best practice in the field of community engagement. Bow to Bluff adopted the storefront idea, creating a welcoming and active environment to attract citizens to participate in the engagement process. Running our project in a convenient location over many weeks allowed a great number and variety of stakeholders to participate at different levels, and enabled the vision for the public corridor to evolve with citizens’ understanding.

The Ward 7 Office helped us to secure a large working space, which was right next to the Bow to Bluff corridor on 2nd Avenue and 10th Street NW. The old City-owned “Ant Hill building”, mostly empty for years, had the advantage of big display windows and commercial frontage on the busiest street in Kensington. The City, and later, the new private owner, were very generous, only charging a minimum fee to rent the building.

This ideal location attracted plenty of passersby as well as local residents, and allowed us to organize activities and even solicit feedback right in the corridor. We structured many events to take advantage of the location (see Events). For example, we ran guided tours of the corridor for hundreds of university students, school-aged children, and even City staff, ending each tour at the storefront to capture their ideas to improve the public space.

BRIGHT IDEA: A dedicated physical space gives citizen-generated input a “home”: people can come in to engage with their information. This encourages pride and ownership in the project; people feel they have a stake in the process.

Inside the Ant Hill was a completely open gallery-like space with high, white walls, a huge skylight, and a delivery bay at the back. We wanted to make an active, colourful, fun place where people would feel welcome to participate in a creative conversation about public space. So we set up three main areas: the project area, the ‘faux park’, and the Kids’ Corner.

The project area comprised the information table, display boards, and ‘Where do you live?’ city map at the front of the building, as well as a feedback table with sticky notepads and pens. When people wandered in, they were welcomed by a volunteer who briefly explained the project. They were then invited to peruse the design work in progress and contribute to the walls of colourful sticky notes. Allowing input to be unstructured inspired people to be creative and ‘think big’.

We created a ‘faux park’ in the middle of the open space, with park benches and patio furniture donated by City Parks, and a large, fake grass rug donated by the Calgary Horticultural Society. Planters of flowers and tiki umbrellas added a festive touch. People could grab a coffee and treat from the snack table, and sit and relax in the ‘park’.

Our youngest stakeholders enjoyed the Kids’ Corner we set up next to the park. Tents, books, puzzles, and toys were strewn on big rugs so wee ones were safely occupied while their parents participated in the project. School groups drew and posted their ideas on big maps of the corridor, which were displayed on the walls.
“Storefront location and space added to the overall energy of the project—a great success!” — City Parks

During the project, it was relatively straightforward to set up, move around or clear away entire areas of the storefront to accommodate different events. For example, there were bleachers and designer stations for the Iron Sketch contest, but a dozen large worktables and chairs at the DESIGN workshop. For the bike event, we cleared the concrete floor and drew a ‘bike box’ and bike lanes with sidewalk chalk, so cyclists could actually ride their bikes into the building. We even condensed the entire storefront into a single upstairs room so we could share the space with the Market Collective artisan fair for one weekend.

Although we pasted a large Bow to Bluff poster and calendar in two of the front windows, we left the rest of the windows uncovered so passersby were drawn to the colourful flurry of activity inside. We also used a sandwich board and sidewalk chalk drawings to attract attention. The front door was kept open as much as the weather allowed. Volunteers on the sidewalk greeted people with postcards, buttons, and even cupcakes.

BRIGHT IDEA: Here are several great ideas that we didn’t have time to try: (1) an exhibition showcasing great public spaces and placemaking projects in other cities; (2) a comprehensive list of learning resources; (3) a video tour of the corridor and slideshow of B2B activities running online and in the storefront; (4) a dedicated workspace for designers and City staff to meet and work together inhouse and onsite; (5) citizen-run placemaking activities and ‘experiments’ in the corridor.

The biggest downside of the Ant Hill building was the warehouse-like echo, which made listening quite difficult in large group discussions. The curtains we rented to attenuate the echo were too thin and too few to make much difference. Covering the walls with thin foam or bristol board, or making smaller spaces with moveable walls might have been more effective to absorb sound. The echo also made the building feel uninvitingly bare when there were fewer people about. In retrospect, playing soft, relaxing music might have made people feel more at ease.

One interesting observation was that although people liked the ‘faux park’, it was only rarely used. Upon reflection, we realized that although it was colourful and attractive, we forgot to activate the space. Every other area had been programmed: people looked at displays and posted their ideas in the project area; participants added to maps and designs at the workshop tables; children played in the Kids’ Corner. In fact, kids were the only ones who tried to activate the park: they dragged toys over to it, ate their lunches at the small tables, and rolled around in the fake grass.

BRIGHT IDEA: We could have created a great public space right in the storefront—by simply placing the coffee/snack table next to it, putting the pens and sticky notepads on the patio tables, or adding a variety of ‘building blocks’, allowing people to do placemaking activities or even reconfigure the park themselves.
Onsite Engagement: installation sounding boards

“The sounding boards [along the corridor] were wildly successful as our ‘under construction signs’.”
— B2B RPC member

The Bow to Bluff design team proposed an original and innovative idea: what if we installed large boards right in the corridor to solicit citizen feedback? Their idea was inspired by similar attempts to engage citizens in public spaces, such as the “I wish this was…” name tags by artist Candy Chang in New Orleans.

City Transit generously supported the idea of attaching four installation sounding boards along the LRT fence, two of them at Sunnyside LRT station. Each plywood board was covered in sticky notes (colour-coded by board location) or a large bird’s eye view map of the corridor. All the boards had a short explanation of the project, Transit’s stamp of approval, and a cup holder with ballpoint pens and markers. At the top of the boards was a simple question in big, bold letters: “How can we make this space better?”

Nearly a thousand people waiting for trains or buses, or just passing through, took a moment to scribble down their ideas to improve the corridor. Although there were some silly or offensive posts, they were surprisingly few. There was also very little graffiti; a few taggers carefully marked the boards in a corner, seemingly to avoid spoiling other people’s feedback. The sounding boards seemed to convey to citizens that this was their space for sharing their thoughts on the corridor, and that we truly wanted to listen to their ideas.

Building the boards was inexpensive, maintaining them was straightforward. Volunteers inspected the boards every day for a month, collecting input, replacing used sticky notes and checking the pen supply. The data was then entered into the computer for data analysis (sorting, clustering), and compiled with the storefront feedback.

The installation sounding boards were the most successful engagement device used in the corridor. Less effective were the coroplast signs with a phone number for texting that we posted in the pocket parks. We also tried to engage passersby directly in the corridor, with varying success. We gave out postcards and coffee, held a ‘picnic’ near the LRT station, and ran guided tours of the corridor. Unfortunately, the storefront engagement was so consuming, we didn’t have the time or energy to organize placemaking activities in the corridor.

BRIGHT IDEA: In hindsight, we could have made even more use of the installation sounding boards by turning them into communication centres for project updates, photos, and event promotion. We also should have weatherproofed the boards with an awning or plastic tarp, and added key maps and a better ‘narrative’ to explain the engagement process.
Targeted stakeholder events

“It was brilliant that we simply planned workshops and ad hoc [events] as the need arose.”
“[We] should not have held [quite] so many ad hoc public events!” — B2B team members

Early on, we decided that simply holding regular storefront hours and hoping people would drop in was not enough. To attempt to reach everyone using the corridor, and to generate citywide interest in public engagement, we had to be active and creative in our outreach strategy. We ended up organizing 25 special events over seven weeks, targeting different stakeholder groups. We also promoted Bow to Bluff at many community events and festivals over the summer, to create ‘buzz’ before our launch date in October.

“Fresh ways to gather citizen input worked really well….I really enjoyed the process and learned a great deal of new and creative ways to solicit input from the public .” — City Parks administrator

Some events, like the open houses, were free-form. Others, like the guided tours or workshops, were more formally programmed. For example, the highly organized DESIGN workshop was run like a focus group: participants were asked to pre-register for a facilitated half-day co-design session.

BRIGHT IDEA: Our most successful events in terms of soliciting input involved taking groups for guided tours of the corridor, and ending up at the storefront so people could scribble down their ideas right away.

The combination of storefront open hours, exciting events, and installation sounding boards combined with a constant promotion campaign did attract overwhelming numbers of participants to Bow to Bluff (see Appendix: Statistics). The storefront alone attracted over 500 visitors, events drew nearly a thousand people, and the sounding boards yielded about 900 ideas. However, running such a large scale engagement process took an incredible amount of work and volunteer hours (see Appendix: Sweat Equity). We were agile enough to quickly plan and execute events on the fly, but in retrospect, given our volunteer capacity, we perhaps should have held fewer events, and required them to be directly related to the project. Also, we spent too much energy trying to accommodate different user groups and remodeling the storefront for different events.

BRIGHT IDEA: Identify your stakeholders and schedule events based on your project goals and volunteer capacity. Plan your communications cycle to run in tandem with the event schedule; our communications and events coordinators were in daily contact to constantly promote, organize, run, and report on events.

The following table shows the list of Bow to Bluff events in chronological order, and the stakeholder groups we tried to engage. (Note: the one opportunity we missed was to specifically engage local business owners and developers, although some of them did drop in to other events.) The second table shows the pre-launch community events that we attended over the summer to promote the upcoming project.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Bow to Bluff Events</strong></th>
<th><strong>Date</strong></th>
<th><strong>Stakeholder groups</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make it your space (setting up the storefront)</td>
<td>Sep 25/11</td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnic at the gazebo (placemaking in the corridor)</td>
<td>Sep 26/11</td>
<td>Passersby, residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Opening (B2B launch)</td>
<td>Oct 2/11</td>
<td>All stakeholders including City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Sketch (designer ‘contest’ to demonstrate co-design process)</td>
<td>Oct 6/11</td>
<td>Urban designers, students, residents, passersby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit tour of the Bow to Bluff Corridor and Sunnyside</td>
<td>Oct 11/11</td>
<td>University urban design students from Jen Malzer’s Transit class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamarack tour of the Bow to Bluff Corridor</td>
<td>Oct 15/11</td>
<td>Attendees of the Tamarack Conference (many visiting from out-of-town)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth tour of the Bow to Bluff Corridor and workshop</td>
<td>Oct 18/11</td>
<td>Next Up youth leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage night</td>
<td>Oct 19/11</td>
<td>Seniors, local residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student tour of the Bow to Bluff Corridor (#1)</td>
<td>Oct 20/11</td>
<td>Grade 7-12 (junior/senior high) students from Banbury Crossroads School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling tour of the Bow to Bluff Corridor and new bike box / bike lanes</td>
<td>Oct 20/11</td>
<td>Bike Calgary, cyclists, local residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Collective / Bow to Bluff (sharing the Ant Hill building)</td>
<td>Oct 22, Oct 23/11</td>
<td>Attendees of Market Collective artisan fair, shoppers, youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City tour of the Bow to Bluff corridor and workshop #1 (led by the B2B design team)</td>
<td>Oct 24/11</td>
<td>City administrators, Ward 7 Office, Office of the Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuter postcards (handing out postcards at rush hour in the B2B corridor)</td>
<td>Oct 25, Oct 26, Oct 28/11</td>
<td>Commuters at the LRT station, passersby, residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McHugh Bluff ‘missing stairs’ workshop</td>
<td>Oct 26/11</td>
<td>Residents from Rosedale, Crescent Heights, Hillhurst-Sunnyside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student tour of the Bow to Bluff Corridor (#2)</td>
<td>Oct 27/11</td>
<td>Grade 4-6 students from Banbury Crossroads School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Turner book signing</td>
<td>Oct 28/11</td>
<td>Passersby, residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liveable Laneways / Bow to Bluff tour</td>
<td>Oct 29/11</td>
<td>Design students, residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student tour of the Bow to Bluff corridor (#3)</td>
<td>Oct 31/11</td>
<td>Grade 4-6 students from Sunnyside School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Houses</td>
<td>Nov 2, Nov 3/11</td>
<td>Passersby, residents, businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN Workshop (co-design session led by B2B design team)</td>
<td>Nov 5/11</td>
<td>All stakeholders including City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City workshops (feedback session led by B2B design team)</td>
<td>Nov 7, Nov 9/11</td>
<td>City administrators, Ward 7 Office, Office of the Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permaculture/Mead tasting</td>
<td>Nov 12/11</td>
<td>Passersby, residents, permaculture enthusiasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCC/CAs night (B2B discussion with other communities)</td>
<td>Nov 16/11</td>
<td>Federation of Calgary Communities, community associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFINE the DESIGN workshop (feedback/open house led by B2B design team)</td>
<td>Nov 19/11</td>
<td>All stakeholders including City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2B Wrap-Up Party (project wrap-up, volunteer appreciation and design concept review)</td>
<td>Dec 8/11</td>
<td>All stakeholders including City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community events (attended to promote Bow to Bluff before our launch date)</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Stakeholder groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane’s Walk (<em>Bow to Bluff Corridor tour and promotion</em>)</td>
<td>May 8/11</td>
<td>Anyone interested in great public space, residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit workshop #1 (<em>small group co-design session</em>)</td>
<td>Jun 16/11</td>
<td>Small diverse group of invited citizens (primarily residents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit workshop #2 (<em>small group co-design session</em>)</td>
<td>Jul 6/11</td>
<td>Larger diverse group of invited citizens (primarily residents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit Open House</td>
<td>Jul 20/11</td>
<td>All stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun ‘n Salsa Festival</td>
<td>Jul 24/11</td>
<td>Attendees of Sun ‘n Salsa: visitors, shoppers, businesses, residents (city-wide interest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSCA Farmers Markets</td>
<td>Jul – Aug/11</td>
<td>Shoppers, residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bow River Flow (<em>B2B booth promoting engagement project</em>)</td>
<td>Aug 21/11</td>
<td>Attendees of Bow River Flow festival: cyclists, pedestrians, visitors, residents (city-wide interest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVDS tour of Bow to Bluff Corridor and storefront location</td>
<td>Sep 17/11</td>
<td>University urban design students from Noel Keough’s class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunnyside School Fall Fair (<em>B2B booth promoting engagement project</em>)</td>
<td>Sep 17/11</td>
<td>Students, parents, teachers at Sunnyside School, residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest Festival at The Area in Inglewood</td>
<td>Sep 24/11</td>
<td>General public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bow to Bluff Communications Process

From the first poster defining the opportunity to create a great public space to the professionally produced Design Framework (and this Process Guide), good, clear communications have proved critical to Bow to Bluff’s success. Right from the beginning, we had to clearly explain who we were, what we wanted to do, and how we were going to improve public engagement. In addition to the initial B2B poster, we quickly developed a two-sentence ‘elevator statement’ and a FAQ sheet to answer basic questions people had about the project.

“Bow to Bluff is a citizen-based initiative to collaboratively create great public spaces in the corridor that runs along the Sunnyside LRT line from Memorial Drive to McHugh Bluff. We invite all stakeholders to participate in an innovative engagement process and placemaking activities to reimagine the corridor.” — original project ‘elevator statement’

Writing the proposal for a Council Innovation Fund grant helped us to identify the innovation potential and citywide benefits of the project as well as consolidate our project goals, timeline, budget, and deliverables. We framed Bow to Bluff as a timely opportunity to launch a new model of citizen-based engagement that would be not only collaborative and inclusive, but also positive, productive, and cost-effective. We proposed to work closely with the City as well as community stakeholders, and to respect the guidelines of the current Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) for public space. (See Appendix: CIF grant proposal).

Drafting the Request for Proposals (RFPs) allowed us to further clarify the project’s aspirations, the storefront idea, and our desire to produce a truly citizen-generated design from citizen-centered engagement. The tremendous response to the RFP from top tier design firms, the early interest of the public, and the unanimous vote by Council to award the CIF grant, were due in part to our ability to clearly and continuously articulate the Bow to Bluff vision.

“Clarity [in communications] is next to godliness.” — B2B RPC member

While promoting Bow to Bluff at community events over the summer, the RPC and the facilitator started to build a communications strategy that would run in tandem with the engagement process. We wanted to reach as many different stakeholders as possible, including the City, and encourage them to participate in the engagement process.

The communications team ran a relentless, proactive, and cheerful campaign to promote the core idea of citizen-led engagement around a public space. Enough “buzz” was created that thousands of people were attracted to the storefront and events. By identifying how to reach every stakeholder group, we developed a multi-channel, online, real-time approach to raise awareness and create excitement around the project. The team and its strategy were agile enough to promote ad hoc events with only a few days’ notice: once the basic message was drafted, it could be sent out through all communications channels at once.
BRIGHT IDEA: The communications team and the storefront/event team should work closely together to create an efficient, effective cycle of promotion and engagement. Ideally, communications needs to have event details 1–2 weeks in advance to effectively promote it through all channels and fit into the media cycle.

We used traditional techniques (posters, flyers, public service announcements, media kits, display boards, phone) and traditional communications channels (bulletin boards, outdoor message boards, window displays, newspapers, TV, radio, presentations). We attracted media attention from City TV, CBC, CTV, CJW, OpenFile, FFWD, Avenue, Calgary Herald, and HSCA Voice. We also handed out postcards to passersby, flyered local residents, postered the corridor, and even wrote and drew in sidewalk chalk all over the study area. Thanks to the Ward 7 Office, key City staff were kept up-to-date during the engagement process.

We decided to go online in a big way. The Bow to Bluff website was updated daily with blog posts and announcements during the engagement process, and attracted 3700 total hits, of which 2300 were unique visitors. We sent a weekly email newsletter out to hundreds of people who signed up. We posted announcements and articles on our own and related Facebook pages, Meetup and Google groups, Twitter feeds, contact networks, media lists, websites, and blogs. People could also respond online by emailing, texting, retweeting, or commenting on our blog and FB pages. We even linked up with the Mayor’s civic engagement campaign, “3 Things for Calgary”, as an opportunity to reach a citywide audience.

BRIGHT IDEA: Here are a few tips: (1) The weekly email newsletter should be drafted one full day before the mailout; (2) Give people more than one reason to re-visit your website; (3) Post the design-in-progress on the website for citizens to review online; (4) Build a robust contacts database and roll out the full website and branding at least two weeks before the launch date.

In hindsight, we could have done more to reach seniors, local business owners, and developers, but we were limited by our volunteer capacity. We were also unfortunately unable to attract other ward Councilors or the Mayor to storefront events. However, the ‘communications blitz’ did create a positive buzz and raise general awareness around civic engagement.

In terms of resources, we used Word Press to build the website, Mail Chimp to email the weekly newsletter, MSWord to draft documents, Google Mail, Google Calendar, and Eventbrite for workshop registration. These tools were easy to use, but the Calendar was too simplistic and Eventbrite too complicated for our purposes. We were lucky to have an experienced marketing/PR person and a technical writer onboard; the services of a graphics/logo designer and printing company were hired when needed.

“Building trust [in the community] over many months of communications and events paid off when the storefront opened.” — B2B design team member
Bow to Bluff Design Process

“It really felt like the collective voice of the community was heard by the design team.”
— City Parks

The design team and the facilitator ran the design side of the project—from planning the work program to running the co-design workshops—while the adjutant, RPC, and volunteers handled components of the engagement process such as storefront maintenance, general events / logistics, and communications. The designers also actively participated in the storefront, set up the installation sounding boards, and attended various events and City staff meetings. During the engagement phase, they developed the initial design themes and concepts from what stakeholders were saying. The team then produced the Bow to Bluff Design Framework (April 2012) using all the input collected during the seven weeks of citizen engagement.

“This has been one of the most interesting projects...the ideas came from the community. This is not an O2 design, but a citizen-based design.”
— B2B designer from O2 Planning + Design

The first step in the design process was site analysis: looking at the Bow to Bluff corridor from a design perspective to understand the context of problems and potential solutions in the area. The designers studied maps, aerial photos, zoning regulations, and documents such as the local ARP. They also walked around the area at different times of day and night, observed how people were (or were not) using the public spaces, and analyzed the different pocket park environments and microclimates. From this information, they created the initial maps and photo boards for citizens to consider and discuss.

A designer was available at the storefront for the first two weeks to talk to people and listen to their issues and ideas around the Bow to Bluff public space. The team also installed sounding boards along the corridor to collect input (see Onsite Engagement), and created a design process plan (see Appendix: Gant chart). The adjutant and volunteers collected the storefront and sounding board input, entering it into a database and sending it to the designers for analysis.

Due to resource and time constraints, the designers were not able to be as involved with the storefront engagement as much as we’d hoped; similarly, the RPC was not able to be as involved with the design process as much as we’d expected. In hindsight, we could have allocated our limited resources more effectively; for example, holding set ‘designer hours’ and having a dedicated ‘designer desk’ at the storefront might have worked better. RPC should also have scheduled regular meetings with the design team, and been more involved in the data analysis and development of the design concepts (see B2B RPC: Relationships).

BRIGHT IDEA: It is worth noting the difference between citizen engagement (anyone can drop in), stakeholder engagement (selected citizens are invited to give input), and co-design (the evolution of a design between designers and citizens over a period of time). Bow to Bluff gave all interested citizens the opportunity to drive the initial design concepts; however, we did not have the resources to consult the community during the development of the design framework.
**Design-related events**

The designers organized the DESIGN and REFINE the DESIGN workshops and three City workshops; they also participated in the B2B Grand Opening, Iron Sketch, the Banbury junior/senior high school tour, the Transit class tour, and the B2B wrap-up event.

The Grand Opening and Iron Sketch kicked off seven weeks of B2B-style citizen engagement. At the Grand Opening, the designers explained the display boards in the storefront, and ran tours of the sounding boards in the corridor. There were cupcakes and even a light-hearted ribbon-cutting ceremony with Alderman Farrell, with the “‘faux park” representing the Bow to Bluff public space. Iron Sketch was a lively demonstration of the co-design process, organized as a ‘contest’ between competing teams of designers and audience participants in the manner of the popular show, “Iron Chef”. Two well-known local designers volunteered to ‘take on’ our O2 designer. The well-attended event drew the design community and the public for an evening of high-spirited fun.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** High profile, well-organized and fun events that draw people in can create a lot of positive “buzz” for an engagement process, as well as educate people about the project.

Three weeks into the engagement process, the design team organized a meeting and walking tour at the storefront with City staff, the Ward 7 Office, and representatives from the Office of the Mayor. The designers presented the five main categories representing most of the citizen input gathered to date: (1) repurposing 9A Street (‘woonerfing’); (2) addressing the Big Green Fence (‘turning a liability into an asset’); (3) integrating existing infrastructure (‘creative use of spaces under bridges and pocket parks’); (4) connecting the corridor (‘McHugh Bluff access’) and; (5) exploring an opportunity (‘public realm component of the warehouse site’). City staff offered some feedback and ideas, but were understandably cautious in terms of ‘managing public expectations’, since there was no implementation funding and the very success of our engagement was starting to raise public hopes.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** We did not have the capacity to engage the City as much as we engaged the citizenry, but it would have been valuable to have City staff more actively involved in the co-design process.

The DESIGN workshop in November comprised two tightly programmed, half-day co-design sessions allowing citizens to brainstorm about the identified design themes in small, facilitated working groups. The workshop attracted a fairly diverse set of citizens in terms of age, gender, profession and residency (city-wide interest). Participants came up with all sorts of creative and more deeply considered suggestions through the brainstorm process; we found that non-design-experts understood a fair amount about what constitutes good design and usability, and what makes a public space great. The session was a lot of fun because people were allowed to think big and go outside the box (for example, one group asked “how does the chicken cross the road?” to deal with corridor connectivity). Judging by the feedback, citizens felt truly consulted in a collaborative exercise; the designers received a ton of valuable design ideas and creative suggestions.

We held two follow-up meetings for City staff to examine the citizen ideas generated from the DESIGN workshop. They were supportive, but limited in their feedback without a final detailed design. In hindsight, we should have specified more clearly what we needed in terms of City feedback at this point in the process.
REFINE the DESIGN was more open house than scripted workshop, as the design team received so much useful input from the first co-design session, they felt they didn’t need to repeat its tight format. However, the casual format had the unintended effect of dampening input. Participants weren’t quite sure what was expected of them, and seemed reluctant to draw or write on the maps without structure or ‘permission’. Also, people were not clear on why specific design decisions had been made, not making the connection between the range of citizen input and the design’s underlying principles.

In retrospect, we might have done better to structure REFINE as a second co-design session, stressing the connection between engagement and design. In any case, the two weeks between DESIGN and REFINE was much too short to properly develop the design; the designers, RPC and City should have taken a month to synthesize the ideas from the first workshop. We could have also posted the co-design session themes and outcomes online. But by the end of November, everyone was thoroughly exhausted, and worried that the weather was closing in (it is worth noting that REFINE still drew sixty people on a bitterly cold winter day).

BRIGHT IDEA: The two co-design workshops were not as well attended as we’d hoped; we discovered that asking people for a 4 hour commitment was different than asking them to just drop in. We had to advertise heavily over a couple of weeks in advance to attract about 130 people in total.

After the engagement phase wrapped up in December, the O2 design team developed the design concepts from the citizen input collected. Working with RPC and key City staff, the designers finalized the Bow to Bluff Design Framework in early April 2012.
During the project, several unexpected situations arose in the Bow to Bluff study area:

- In May 2011, City Transit was finalizing plans to add a power traction substation and an expanded four-car platform to the Sunnyside LRT station.
- A contractor accidentally removed the old rickety stairs on 9A Street going up McHugh Bluff without the knowledge of City Parks.
- The Transportation department added bike lanes on 10th Street, and a bike box at 5th Avenue and 10th Street in October.
- The old warehouse on 2nd Avenue and 9A Street was demolished, leaving a large, open space along the corridor.

Because the RPC was so agile and proactive, we were able to quickly frame these situations as engagement opportunities, allowing the City and citizens to talk about specific issues in the Bow to Bluff corridor.

In the case of Transit’s proposed improvements to the LRT station and adjacent triangle park, we were able to engage the community to enhance the design. When citizens saw that their ideas actually influenced the final design, they felt truly consulted. Transit staff appreciated our positive, collaborative approach to public engagement; their designers were pleased to receive useful stakeholder input. (See also A Short History: Prototyping the B2B engagement process).

When the McHugh Bluff stairs accidentally went “missing”, we instantly partnered with City Parks to issue an explanation to all residents in the adjacent communities. We organized a workshop to discuss access to the bluff, inviting Parks staff, the Hillhurst-Sunnyside and Rosedale community associations, and affected residents. City Parks immediately set to work stabilizing the badly eroded slope; a gravel zigzag path was built a few months later as a short term solution.

When Transportation unexpectedly added bike lanes and a bike box only a block away, we teamed up with Bike Calgary to do a ride through the corridor and along 10th Street. We even posted a YouTube video of the ride’s participants using the bike lanes and new bike box correctly, to educate other cyclists and drivers.

During the engagement process, people proposed hundreds of ideas to improve the old, derelict warehouse on the corridor. However, the City decided to demolish the building and level the site in February 2012. Half of the resulting open space is currently being used by Transit as equipment and materials storage during the LRT station renovation; the other half has been seeded with grass. The City’s long term plan is to build affordable housing. In the meantime, we would like to encourage placemaking activities and temporary structures that benefit the community and corridor users in the short term. We will continue to facilitate a conversation with the City and citizens about the design of the public realm interfacing any long term housing development.
Project People

B2B Resources and Planning Committee (RPC)

“I joined Bow to Bluff because I wanted to make a difference in my own life and in the lives of other Calgarians. I wanted to be part of something big, ground-breaking…”

“I [wanted] to make our community a better place, build relationships with people and help them engage with our neighbourhood.”

“I saw an opportunity to transform a great public space and invite people to collaborate in a really positive, inclusive way.”

— B2B RPC members

The Bow to Bluff Resources and Planning Committee (B2B RPC) was the group of committed volunteer citizens who organized the public engagement and co-design process for the Bow to Bluff corridor. The RPC was also responsible for delivering the Bow to Bluff Design Framework, the Bow to Bluff Process Guide, and a project financial report.

The RPC functioned as an independent citizen group with City and CA support. The RPC was able to build trust and facilitate a direct conversation between the City and citizen stakeholders about reimagining a great public space.

When the CIF grant was awarded, the four volunteers who had applied formed the RPC. When the City asked the RPC to conduct an RFP and hiring process, one of the volunteers had to step down in order to apply for a paid position on the design team, a move that was unfortunately unsuccessful.

At the same time this volunteer was asked to apply through the formal process, the RPC sole-sourced the facilitator from the Transit workshops to lead the design team (see also Short History). In retrospect, this was inconsistent, but at this point we had not determined our hiring strategy. We were slow to realize that we had to evolve from an informal group into a more structured organization in order to hire contractors and handle the funding in a transparent, accountable way.

BRIGHT IDEA: When citizen-led projects are funded with public money, the steering committee members who control the funds must be volunteers and not paid staff in order to avoid potential conflicts-of-interest.

By July, the RPC had expanded to six volunteers, resulting in a good balance of three community association (CA) members and three non-CA members. All CA members were on the Hillhurst-Sunnyside CA board: one was the board chair, the other two were chairs for the planning and vitalization committees. Four RPC members were the core decision-makers, all professionals in different fields with project experience. The other two were senior advisors / project managers, one of whom had extensive planning background and contacts with City staff which proved useful. Two members came from the Great Public Spaces group of CivicCamp, one came from Sustainable Calgary, and two members were non-local residents, providing a valuable, citywide perspective.
BRIGHT IDEA: The RPC members were dedicated, long-term volunteers who put in thousands of hours to see the project through. Limiting the RPC to a small committed group in the early stages allowed it to be flexible and agile enough to respond quickly to issues as they arose.

The composition and temperament of the RPC was as much part of the project innovation as the engagement process itself: flexible, responsive, highly skilled, and productive as well as optimistic, activist, energetic, and diverse (age, gender, background, professional experience).

It is worth noting that RPC members were all “Type A” personalities and high energy, hands-on volunteers. Although strong-minded members pulled in different directions at times and meetings were often lively and argumentative, the RPC as a whole shared a deep passion for great public spaces and citizen engagement, and a desire to effect real change.

“For a team that came about randomly, we were amazingly pretty well-balanced. We had key skill sets in planning, technical writing, communications, logistics/event planning, and budgeting. Two RPC members had prior good relationships with the Ward Office and City admin, as well as contacts in the design industry.”

— B2B RPC members

During the initial planning phase, the small, dedicated RPC was very productive, able to quickly respond to situations and make decisions. However, the engagement phase was so intense that the RPC was nearly overwhelmed; internal communications, planning and decision-making suffered as a result. There was enough project work for six to eight RPC members; we only had four really active volunteers and two advisors. The RPC would have also benefited from having a constitution with a voting policy, as it was sometimes too difficult or time-consuming to make decisions by consensus.

BRIGHT IDEA: Since not all volunteers on a steering committee can commit huge amounts of time and energy, ensure that those doing the on-the-ground work have the authority to make daily decisions. Have regular meetings with minutes to facilitate effective internal communications, consistency, and a proper paper trail.

The RPC was hardly working in isolation: the hired support team complemented the RPC with a good mix of professional corporate consulting and non-profit community experience. Bow to Bluff also inspired unprecedented support for the RPC from the Ward Office, City Administration, the Office of the Mayor, HSCA, the BRZ, CivicCamp, the design community, and local developers. The good relationship between the RPC and project supporters was essential to the success of the engagement process, and will continue to be a crucial component in the implementation phase.

“A small group of committed volunteers gave it 150% and did not waver until [we] largely completed what [we] set out to do.”

— B2B RPC member
B2B RPC – Support Team

The RPC hired professional contractors to support the project: a facilitator, a communications / logistics adjutant, and a team of designers. The facilitator, an early B2B contributor, was initially hired for the Transit workshops, and kept with the expectation that he would manage a couple of independent designers. However, the RPC hired a design team from O2 Planning + Design which included an engagement / facilitation expert from Intelligent Futures (see RFPs and Hiring Process).

The RPC decision to hire the Transit facilitator separately from the design team had unforeseen repercussions for the support team structure and engagement process. There was some confusion about roles, responsibilities and reporting structure, resulting in sporadic internal communications, ‘scope creep’, and in some cases, unnecessary duplication of effort. Overall, the engagement process lacked integrated, effective project management.

Had we taken the “one team, one contract” approach, the RPC–support team relationship would have been much simplified. Given that we had hired contractors piecemeal, the RPC should have clearly defined the support team structure up front, and interfaced directly with the team to streamline the internal communications and decision-making processes.

Also, due to bad timing, schedule conflicts, and the absence of key members, the RPC and contractors did not have an initial project planning meeting to define the project framework, which would have done much to resolve any issues around team structure and project management right away.

However, in spite of the awkward team structure, ad hoc management, and RPC’s tendency to micro-manage, the support team displayed incredible dedication to the project and passion for citizen engagement.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** Once the complete team is hired, have a full day planning meeting to work out the project’s goals, scope, and milestones. Define the team structure and project management protocols for internal communications, decision-making, and resource and milestone tracking.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** On a citizen-led project with public funding, the innovation is that volunteer citizens are leading the engagement process, with the paid team supporting the citizen effort. The boundary between the role of the volunteer decision-makers (who control the funding) and that of the contractors (who are paid with the funding) should be very clear.

**BRIGHT IDEA:** The paid contractors were only contracted to the project part-time; other work sometimes distracted them from Bow to Bluff. Make sure that you have enough committed hours from the hired team to support your project and its timeline.
The RPC was a highly involved, “hands on” group that ended up shouldering the bulk of the day-to-day project management for the engagement process, and pitching in wherever needed. This was not beyond RPC capabilities, but it was nearly beyond its capacity. The support team also worked to full capacity; for example, there should have been more than one adjutant to handle logistics, communications, volunteer recruitment, and storefront / sounding board maintenance.

BRIGHT IDEA: Step back every few weeks to ‘see the forest, not just the trees’. Revisit the fundamentals to make sure that the project and its resources are being managed effectively by the right people in the right places; if necessary, reassign responsibilities and resources to rebalance the team.

Each RPC member took on a portfolio and acted as the main contact and decision-maker for that portfolio. One RPC member worked on Engagement with the facilitator; another RPC member worked on Design with the designers, and was also the main liaison for the City. Another RPC member, with the adjutant, dealt with Communications, and two RPC members took responsibility for the Finance / Budget portfolio. Various events were spearheaded by different RPC members and the support team.

Because the RPC took such an active role in the communications and engagement processes, and because the design team was self-managing the design process, it might have been more useful to have a project coordinator to support and coordinate between the two, rather than a manager as project overseer.

“Given that there was not one dedicated project manager, it generally went fairly well. The expertise level of [RPC] volunteers was very high. [However], when transferring this project to another community, a risk assessment may be necessary to ensure overall structure is appropriate.”
— Ward 7 Office

B2B RPC – City

The partnership between the RPC and the City was itself innovative: an independent citizen group invited the City to participate in a citizen-led engagement process to collaboratively reimagine a great public space. The City supported the independence of this engagement initiative; the RPC acted as a neutral third party to build trust between the City and citizens, while respecting existing City policies, plans, and constraints (ARP, TOD, Plan It).

“Being independent from the City and CA was one of the RPC’s most important innovations.”
— B2B RPC advisor

“With any sort of engagement with communities on planning issues, or citizen-led initiatives like this…they’re looking through the lens of making a place better—which touches on many [City] business units. Whereas the City is structured in a way that focuses on a discipline or department, and to a lesser degree on place/community.”
— Office of the Mayor
Right after the grant was awarded, the RPC asked for a ’City liaison’, someone who could help us engage key City staff, negotiate the funding release, and streamline City requirements for the project. This role was mostly filled by default by the Ward 7 Office Executive Assistant (EA), who was, with the Alderman, amazingly accessible and supportive. However, sometimes it felt a little awkward to go through the ward office to access City administration, and the Ward EA of course had very limited time. In hindsight, it might have been better to assign a dedicated City liaison.

Occasionally there was also uncertainty about how we should all work together, what the City really wanted from the initiative, what was considered “off-limits” for public consideration, or how they expected RPC to “manage citizen expectations” around Bow to Bluff. But to the City’s credit, the RPC was free to make most of its own project, hiring, and budget decisions. Also, interested staff from Parks, Transit, Transportation, Planning, Roads, the Ward Office, and even the Office of the Mayor attended workshops, meetings, and even public events to learn about our engagement process and give feedback on the citizen input.

“I get the distinct impression that more citizens were engaged in a meaningful way for less money than many other processes.”

“I was impressed with the public engage techniques and tools. It reached all kinds of community residents. I was also impressed by the respect that the community showed toward the process.”

“[The idea of] the initiative to meet with City staff from different departments to provide input on different levels of the project is great….The enthusiasm of the volunteers for this project was unique and played a big role in moving things forward.”

— City staff

“The sophistication level of the workshops and outcomes from the engagement—it was evident that [there were] very high performing, skilled [RPC] volunteers and a design team that understood the task at hand.”

— Ward 7 Office

 “[Engaging] City staff from the beginning in nearly every step and aspect of Bow to Bluff—I was initially against this but realized later what a brilliant strategy this was to get buy-in and a sense of shared ownership [in the engagement process].”

— B2B RPC member
B2B RPC – Citizenry

The main objective of the engagement process was to attract citywide interest and engage every stakeholder group that uses or is affected by the Bow to Bluff public corridor. We reached out to citizens with a broad, coordinated campaign of promotion, events, workshops, and storefront activities—and citizens showed up in droves to offer their input. (See Engagement Process: Targeted Stakeholder Events for a list of all stakeholders).

We discovered that people really do want to be heard and consulted about great public space. We also found that being a group of ‘fellow citizens’ with solid support from the community association was an advantage, allowing us to frame the relationship between citizen and City stakeholders as an ongoing, collaborative conversation. The vast majority of Bow to Bluff participants were very positive, although some stakeholder groups seemed reluctant to get involved. There were a few disgruntled citizens who ended up revealing hidden concerns in the community and offering valuable insights.

“The RPC and participants felt this mattered….the process] made them feel like change is possible.”
—B2B RPC member

Many citizens volunteered to help the engagement process. Some were from the local community, but many were young urban design students. Enthusiastic and energetic, these volunteers engaged people in conversation, encouraged them to add their input to the ‘wall of stickies’, and staffed various events.

BRIGHT IDEA: TIPS—Assign a volunteer coordinator to recruit and train project volunteers, and be available at all times by phone. Prepare a brief orientation document for training. Notify student volunteers of their shifts 2-4 weeks in advance; avoid scheduling them during midterms and finals. Volunteers should arrive 15 minutes before the shift starts, and notify the coordinator if they cannot make it.

One of the highlights of the engagement process was consulting the youngest stakeholders of the Bow to Bluff corridor. Over one hundred children, aged 8 to 18, toured the corridor and offered over 800 ideas to transform the public spaces. The look on their faces when they realized that their input would be seriously considered by professional designers was priceless. In fact, several of the ideas generated by younger citizens (for example, installing free WiFi in the pocket parks) were adopted into the Bow to Bluff Design Framework.

“Thanks for asking.”
—feedback from several Bow to Bluff participants
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- PI Catering
- Second Cup
- Sunnyside Market
- Sunnyside School
- Sustainable Calgary
- Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement
- Unique Blends
- Vendome Café
Appendix

The Bow to Bluff website, including all project blog posts and downloadable versions of the Bow to Bluff Design Framework and the Bow to Bluff Process Guide can be found at: http://bowtobluff.org

• Original RFP (Designers), including the Bow to Bluff poster and supplementary information (A01 RFP designer poster.pdf)

• Original RFP (Adjutant) (A02 RFP adjutant.pdf)

• Original Bow to Bluff application to the Council Innovation Fund (A03 Initial CIF application.pdf)

• CIF application presented to City Council (A04 Final CIF application.pdf)

• Hiring process: interview questions for designers (A05 Designers interview questions.pdf)

• Hiring process: interview ranking matrix for designers (A06 Designers interview matrix.pdf)

• Bow to Bluff budget as of March 28, 2012 (A07 B2B Budget 120328.pdf)

• Bow to Bluff sweat equity calculations (A08 B2B sweat equity.pdf)

• Online communication statistics (A09 communication stats.pdf)

• Original Gant chart for the design process (09/11) (A10 Original Gant chart)

• City map showing citywide participation in Bow to Bluff engagement process (A11 City map.jpg)

• Bow to Bluff participation statistics (A12 participant stats.pdf)