

Downtown Indy, Inc.

INNOVATION

The project scope included infrastructure updates and creative enhancements to Monument Circle, placemaking/event expansion plans and a strategic communications launch of a new nightly light and sound presentation, the Signature Salute. The five-minute Signature Salute utilizes Monument Circle's surrounding buildings as a canvas for the storytelling of Indiana's veterans, paying homage to the centerpiece of Monument Circle, Indiana's Soldiers and Sailors Monument. The story is video-mapped onto two buildings with a coordinating score produced by the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. The experience ends with four beams of light crossing over the monument, signifying Indianapolis' nickname, the Crossroads of America.

Downtown Indy, Inc. officially launched the project during a Veteran's Day-themed launch event on November 9, 2019. The launch event was truly just the beginning. Beyond the nightly programming, Downtown Indy, Inc. worked to enhance Monument Circle as an event space, installing a state-of-the-art audio system, and acquiring a mobile stage for performances.

As the managers of Monument Circle, Downtown Indy, Inc. launched two enhanced programmatic experiences designed to utilize the new features: Holidays on the Circle and Arts and Culture on the Circle. Holidays on the Circle programming expanded upon the momentum of the 56th annual Circle of Lights at the end of November, and debuted unique holiday programming/a holiday-themed video-mapped vignette. Five not-for-profit organizations will host events as part of the inaugural Arts & Culture on the Circle in the summer/fall of 2020. Downtown Indy, Inc. will continue to strategize to keep programming and communications fresh.

OUTCOME

Such an innovative project called for a robust strategic communications and marketing campaign.

The campaign included three objectives:

- 1) Capitalize on community anticipation, executing a successful pre-event marketing strategy from September-November 2019, engaging local media and community partners.
- 2) Execute successful Veteran's Day-themed launch event debuting Indy's nightly Signature Salute for more than 3,000 individuals on Nov. 9.
- 3) Continue project momentum after Nov. 9 event with launch of Arts & Culture on the Circle and Holidays on the Circle.

The campaign exceeded expectations, solving event infrastructure issues and expanding engagement for key public gathering space. DII utilized strategic qualitative and quantitative metrics to measure success, including partnership engagement, media coverage, community buy-in/interest, grant objective execution and awareness metrics.

Results:

- Media coverage generated 334 stories, reaching 248,880,173, \$2.3 million ad value
- 100,000+ attendees witnessed Signature Salute at Circle of Lights; 80,000+ WTHR viewers
- 6,000 attendees at Holidays on the Circle
- Signature Salute attracts 25-250 people nightly since Nov. 9
- Demonstrated relevance as an urban place management organization leading to increased memberships and renewals
- Launch partners: Governor's Office, Indiana National Guard, City Veterans Services, US Air Force, Hotel Tango Whiskey, Quaff On! Brewing Co./Hard Truth Distillery, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Visit Indy, WISH TV
- Sixty organizations invited to apply for Arts & Culture on the Circle; Six host events in 2020
- Six new cultural organizations performed at Holidays on the Circle
- Community partners, visiting conventions and future event organizers plan to use technology

EXECUTION

After the announcement, DII immediately stepped into action, executing the grant initiative with plans to launch the Signature Salute on November 9, 2019. The team spent much of 2018 planning the strategy around the launch of the grant. Due to the intensity of the grant process, DII successfully developed community, stakeholder and partner buy-in. This enabled the team to take immediate action.

Downtown Indy, Inc. followed a detailed project timeline, as originally presented in its approved grant application. The timeline detailed infrastructure updates, creative content development, partner/stakeholder meetings and communications deadlines.

The successful project management allowed the team to stay on track to execute an impactful final project. The team focused on laying the complex groundwork with key project partners for the launch from January – September, with a public communications launch on September 2, 2019.

Due to the successful launch and partner engagement, Downtown Indy, Inc. has been able to activate the technology for various and timely community initiatives/messages. DII recently utilized the technology to display a message of unity and released a coordinating video of ISO musicians playing “Bridge Over Troubled Water” during Indianapolis’ COVID-19 “stay-at-home” order to spread hope and love from Downtown Indy to the world.

REPRESENTATION

One of the main tenants of Lilly Endowment, Inc.’s Strengthening Indianapolis Through Arts & Culture grant was inclusivity.

Monument Circle, referred to locally as “The Circle,” is Indiana’s most recognizable and identifiable public space. Throughout its history, Monument Circle has served as a crossroads of connection where individuals come to celebrate, to mourn, to pray, to educate and to be inspired as a community. It is flocked by residents, visitors and employees, and surrounded by a complex group of stakeholders including a performing arts venue, hotel, coworking space and corporate headquarters.

Downtown Indy, Inc. remains devoted to the accessibility/inclusivity of the project. From a measurement perspective, Downtown Indy, Inc. is monitoring increased foot traffic on Monument Circle (measured annually); increased use of Monument Circle for events and activations by arts and culture organizations and other diverse entity types (measured annually); and increased participation of arts and culture organizations in other events on Monument Circle (measured annually).

During the project, Downtown Indy, Inc. engaged countless partners including board members, the governor and first lady, mayor and first lady, state officials, city-officials, veteran organizations, downtown stakeholders, artists, art organizations, civic partners, convention organizers, event organizers, media partners, residents and members.

REPLICATION

Although the project is large in scale, its thoughtful communications strategy, partner engagement and relationship management are replicable for downtowns across the country.

- Stakeholder engagement is at the heart of this project. Downtown Indy, Inc. organically engaged partners to act as project champions and ambassadors. Here are a few strategies other communities could implement:
- Volunteer Engagement: Engaged partners in four key volunteer committees (Cultural Curation Committee, Events Committee, Leadership Committee, Creative Committee)
- Stakeholder meetings: Hosted conversations with Monument Circle building owners/tenants
- Stakeholder previews: Hosted three tailored preview events for more than 120 stakeholders
- Brand ambassadors: Identified 45 key “amplifiers” to spread the word via organizational outlets and personal network
- Communications toolkits: Created communications toolkit for partners complete with swag, sample social posts, graphics and videos
- Influencer engagement: Identified 3 key Instagram influencers to “tease out” content of the Signature Salute prior to the launch

Other downtown organizations could also replicate the cohesive, strategic blend that this project allows between programming/events and communications.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

This project is ripe with complexity. Monument Circle is owned and operated by both the city of Indianapolis and the state of Indiana. Beyond operational complexity, it’s surrounded by a variety of stakeholders and frequented by more than 1.5 million visitors per year. Downtown Indy, Inc. employed its engagement and relationship management strategies to ensure early buy-in for the project.

DII learned a few lessons while launching the project, including navigating various layers of the public space. The organization also intends to raise additional programmatic funds from corporate sponsors to sustain the project after the grant term. Due to launch timing, Downtown Indy, Inc. found many corporate fiscal commitments to nonprofit causes have already been made by key targets for 2019. DII also found there was sponsor and donor fatigue by many of the larger companies and corporations who have recently

made financial pledges to support other worthy causes, such as the Champions Fund to help support local efforts in hosting the NBA All Star Game in 2021, the NCAA Men's Final Four in 2021 and the College Football Championship Bowl Game in 2022. DII has engaged key civic champions to lead fundraising for the project in 2020.