

# Rosslyn Business Improvement District (Rosslyn BID)

## INNOVATION

The pandemic made in-person meetings and collaboration challenging at best, so we imagined being able to work outside in the fresh air with all the amenities of the office would be great for our neighborhood. Being outside is associated with reduced stress levels, so this would be a much-needed bonus. But beyond this health crisis, we wanted to help our community think more holistically about how and where we accomplish work. Our hope is that this project helps create a more flexible and exciting work environment that incorporates public spaces as an extension of the office and the buildings, ushering in new approaches and places for working.

At the conception, our goal was to take an existing public amenity (Gateway Park) and incorporate wellness — mental, physical and social — to create a retreat for Rosslyn's employees and residents. With a variety of physically distant workspaces, an online reservation system, extensive safety precautions and plenty of office amenities, O2 is an innovative model that communities across the globe can replicate to promote long-term wellness and connection to public spaces.

Our longer-term vision is to help people think differently about our outdoor spaces and the environment, and inspire them to find new uses for parks. Partnering with commercial property owners, employers and local government, we have demonstrated that it's possible to expand our notion of where work gets done, to not only help manage our current challenges but enable us to envision a more dynamic future of how our cities function.

## OUTCOME

The success of this activation helped reinforce our longstanding belief that open space and natural resources are not only essential to supporting the health and wellbeing of our community, but they can serve as an extension of the office and residential buildings, offering the community even more choice and options for work and wellness.

With over 600 reservations during the two-month time period, O2 received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the community and local businesses. We sent out a weekly survey, which showed that access to a safe and productive work environment was a desired amenity. Additionally, O2 drew people from outside of the immediate area who may not have visited Rosslyn before. Partnerships with local restaurants provided an additional perk for guests, and drove traffic to participating restaurants. The project also garnered positive attention for the park, which promoted a renewed interest in a future master planning effort and provided good initial data on what uses and amenities our community is looking for in our parks and open space.

We are considering what physical assets may stay in the park, and what new items we may install for passive use and enjoyment beyond O2. This pop-up has generated local and national interest and we have shared lessons learned with others interested in doing something similar, making this a model for other communities looking to create more inclusive and flexible public spaces.

## EXECUTION

The Rosslyn BID partnered with Arlington County and its Parks department to help ensure the park was ready for its new role as an outdoor office with beautification and landscaping improvements. A local design firm helped us lay out the space to ensure physical distancing and flexible configurations, while creating an on-brand design experience. We incorporated natural elements such as office walls and lamps made of greenery and moss, and planters to soften hardscaped areas. Flexible seating (and standing) options, huddle spaces and classroom style seating enabled collaboration, while essential office amenities like whiteboards, free Wi-Fi, A/V and boardroom tables (with onsite bathrooms) promoted productivity.

We implemented a one-way flow of traffic and a cleaning schedule to sanitize each workstation in between use, and our online reservation system and check-in desk helped us control capacity and ensure a seamless experience. Our Ambassadors helped us set up and take down some O2 elements each day (stored in a storage space within the park) and served as welcoming faces.

Start to finish, the conception, design, procurement, build-out, and installation took 18 weeks to complete, with marketing, community outreach and engagement efforts happening in parallel.

## REPRESENTATION

O2 was a collaborative effort between the Rosslyn BID and Arlington County Parks, with Parks staff involved at every stage. We also sought input at various milestones from a wide segment of our community (e.g., property owners, residents, businesses and elected officials.)

Given the short timeline, the BID took on the bulk of decision-making and design, and ensuring equity in use was important to us. Before COVID-19, the park was used mostly for Rosslyn BID free events such as an annual outdoor jazz concert, fitness bootcamps and an outdoor cinema. With O2, we wanted to keep the park open to the public, make O2 free of charge and market to the full community, not just the employees in the neighborhood. To ensure broad access, we provided wayfinding signals from the metro, bike rack space onsite and limited free parking.

Future iterations of O2 will continue to be free and open to all in the DC metro area, and there is always public park space available even when O2 is open. We plan to use O2 as an educational tool for demonstrating how organizations like BIDs, governments and other stakeholders can use public spaces in unique ways that encourage holistic wellness.

## REPLICATION

The Rosslyn BID piloted this project as a resource for our businesses and residents during the pandemic, while testing a model for what the future could hold. Bringing people together will always be important but reimagining what “together” means is the task at hand for post-pandemic planning. We believe that better utilizing our outdoor public spaces is a great area for other downtown organizations to explore!

We invested in high-quality workstations, office supplies including portable chargers, and added personal touches like branded mugs and hand sanitizers to make the experience engaging for O2's users. With these resources, a proven logistics plan and a well-mapped park now in place, we can reinstate O2 whenever we think it's needed again – and we believe we could apply this concept and some of these resources in additional outdoor spaces in the neighborhood. We heard from O2 users and Rosslyn businesses that places like O2 will be needed, as people slowly get back to in-person work.

The concept of working outdoors with the safety measures and systems we created is scalable, and could be replicated or modified by other organizations looking to help their community's transition back to in-person work and social gatherings.

## COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

This was one of our first in-person activations during COVID-19, so it was challenging to understand an evolving approvals process and receive permits in time for launch, as restrictions and guidelines were constantly changing. To mitigate the uncertainty of a quick launch, we organized a soft opening to learn how the space functioned, allowing us to make adjustments to the space, reservation system and marketing language describing what guests could expect.

Given the short timeframe from design to opening, we had to work with the space “as-is.” So, we used planters to help block off areas that posed tripping hazards while beautifying the space. We also ensured we were ADA compliant and there were several spatial configurations planned out in advance based on the size of the group on any given day.

Another challenge with O2 was creating an online system to manage the number of people using the space, while also factoring in open access to ensure ample public park space for all. The web-based reservation system along with a process to allow walk-ins ensured safe numbers in compliance with state regulations, while the physical build-out of the space allowed us to quickly reconfigure work spaces as needed.