



West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Trojan Rocking Horses was conceived to achieve several key objectives:

1. Engaging the community: The project sought to actively involve residents in shaping the future of downtown West Palm Beach.
2. Providing a platform for expression: Using postcards attached to the horses, residents of all ages could anonymously share their visions and dreams for the city.
3. Fostering ownership and participation: The interactive nature of the project aimed to instill a sense of belonging and encourage active involvement in community development.

The project consisted of eight life-sized rocking horses, each designed by local children and fabricated locally under the guidance of world-renowned Finnish artist and architect, Marco Casagrande. Inspired by the stories of the Barefoot Mailman, the horses traveled throughout various neighborhoods, collecting over 1,300 messages from citizens about their hopes and aspirations for the city and downtown area. This innovative approach addressed the challenge of limited traditional community engagement methods by providing a creative and accessible platform for diverse voices to be heard. Following the collection phase, the dreams were analyzed and presented to the community through the Dream Machine workshop. This workshop not only manifested some of the collected dreams into reality but also facilitated the co-design of a mobile community center. This envisioned Dream Machine would serve as a hub for future community engagement and placemaking programming. The Dream Machine is envisioned as an evolving entity, with programming tailored to the desires of the community for their public spaces.

INNOVATION

The Trojan Rocking Horses project epitomizes innovation in community development through its multifaceted approach using creative engagement, inclusive dialogue and community reach. By employing mobile horse-shaped installations, the project sparked imagination and encouraged widespread participation has sparked creative engagement. This innovative tactic made community involvement enjoyable and accessible to all. By ensuring anonymity, the project created a safe space for all residents to express their thoughts and aspirations freely, fostering a more inclusive dialogue about the future of downtown West Palm Beach. The project's mobile format transcended traditional boundaries, engaging residents in various locations and communities, thereby amplifying its impact and reach. Moreover, the subsequent Dream Machine project will further exemplify innovation by offering a modular and adaptable community engagement space. Its distinct units cater to different needs and interests, from environmental education and food cultivation to creative expression and community exchange. Based on co-design efforts, the Dream Machine will feature three key areas:

- The Environment & Food Unit: This section will boast a living wall teeming with plants, serving as a platform for environmental education. A large table will become the heart of a collaborative space for cooking and sharing meals prepared with fresh herbs from the garden.
- The Expression Unit: A stepped platform will provide a stage for creative activities like collages and writing. Storage for materials will allow for easy space transformation, enabling residents to host impromptu performances.
- The Exchange Unit: Walls and designated surfaces will create a vibrant space for community exchange. Residents can donate and receive clothes, books, and essential "Dignity" items, fostering a spirit of generosity and connection.

The Dream Machine's design prioritizes accessibility and inclusivity, incorporating sensory elements and playful layouts to encourage exploration and participation by all members of the community.

OUTCOME

The impact of our project in urban settings, addressing the challenge of limited voices heard in traditional forums, has been substantial and measured through applied anthropology and open-form design methodology. The project aimed to empower often overlooked citizens, particularly children, providing them a platform to express their needs and envision positive futures. The Trojan Rocking Horses initiative engaged 210 children from eight communities, generating over 1300 dreams and ideas during its initial phase. Themes emerged, covering environment and sustainability, social justice and inclusion, economic development and housing and personal aspirations and entertainment. The project fostered inclusivity, honest expression, positive dialogue, and reduced polarization, reaching individuals who typically do not participate in standard meetings. Multiple groups directly benefited, including residents, merchants and visitors, fostering an intergenerational demographic in West Palm Beach. The project's longevity and impact are evident in its transition to a yearly program. The Trojan Rocking Horses will travel to different locations, collecting messages and ideas, culminating in a central mobile community center. This self-sustaining program involves community partners hosting horses, creating an ongoing process of gathering feedback from various areas outside the city center. The mobile community center, currently under participatory planning, will be modular, housing the horses and serving as a hub for regrouping information each year. In summary, the project not only solved the problem of limited representation in city discussions but also demonstrated durability and a potential for growth, becoming a self-sustaining, inclusive initiative that continuously engages the community.

EXECUTION

Over six months, the project progressed through planning, workshops, design and fabrication, community engagement, a culminating parade, and analysis for future engagement. Community groups were brought on board to assist with workshops, materials, and fabrication. Over 210 children across the city participated in eight design workshops, shaping the project's heart – the horses themselves. Local and international artists, guided by Marco Casagrande, then worked together to bring the children's visions to life. Once complete, the horses embarked on eight community engagement tours, collecting over 1,300 messages from residents, fostering dialogue and participation. The project concluded with a parade to City Hall, where messages were presented to the mayor. It is worth noting that the project stayed within budget and timeframe, showcasing effective resource allocation and management. The high-quality artwork, a result of the collaboration between local and international artists, deeply resonated with residents. Furthermore, the project's success led to the inception of the Dream Machine mobile community co-design workshop, which builds upon the dreams collected and is progressing towards final design and fabrication in 2024.

REPRESENTATION

The project prioritized inclusivity and representation throughout its development. Diverse partnerships, encompassing 63 schools, community centers and cultural venues, were. To ensure accessibility, eight workshops were held in diverse neighborhoods, with multilingual materials available in English and Spanish. Furthermore, the anonymous format encouraged participation from individuals who might not feel comfortable speaking publicly. The partnerships ranged from providing a venue space to actively participating as facilitators. The level of engagement enabled the partners to become stewards of portions of the project. All engagement was conducted in both outdoor public spaces and indoor locations that are accessible to a multiplicity of people with a wide range in economic backgrounds, cultural and ethnic diversity, age range and that represent many types of users for our downtown. The DDA provided an equitable opportunity for many types of people to be part of the project that normally would not come together. Over 1,300 messages were collected from a diverse array of participants, spanning residents, merchants and visitors. It also provided a platform for children as young as three years old to express their voices, showcasing the project's extensive reach and inclusivity.

REPLICATION

The Trojan Rocking Horses project offers a replicable model for community engagement in various contexts. Here is how it can be adapted:

- Adapt the art form: Different art installations can be used, such as murals, sculptures or even temporary structures, depending on the project's goals and the community preferences.
- Targeted prompts: Prompts or questions posed to the community can be adapted to address specific issues or planning initiatives, ensuring the project resonates with local needs.
- Consider mobility: Mobile installations can be used to reach diverse populations and ensure accessibility.
- Partner with local organizations: Collaboration with schools, community centers and other local groups to reach a wider audience and leverage their networks.
- Maintain anonymity: Anonymity can be encouraged to promote honest and inclusive participation.

By adapting these core elements, communities can implement similar projects to spark public dialogue and gather valuable insights from residents.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

The project's core concept was simple; however, executing the project involved logistical complexities:

- Securing diverse partnerships: Reaching out to various community groups and establishing collaborations.
- Organizing workshops: Scheduling, facilitating and managing workshops across different locations, ensuring child participation with parental permission.
- Coordinating horse movement: Planning routes, logistics and volunteers for moving the sculptures. In addition to dealing with outdoor elements such as the weather.
- Data collection and analysis: Managing the large volume of messages received.
- Mitigation of asset liability and tracking of the sculptures: The initial desire for real-time route tracking for public interaction proved impractical. The solution involved using Apple Tags on the sculptures to mitigate theft or misplacement during their simultaneous movement across eight different routes for five days. Social media and partner networks were used to update the public with key locations to interact with the horses and collected dreams without a formal schedule, adding the possibility of chance encounters. These challenges were addressed through effective planning, collaboration and creative problem-solving. The project's success demonstrates that complex logistics can be navigated to achieve a simple and impactful outcome.