IDA DOWNTOWN ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

ANTHEM ROW: REIMAGINED. RECLAIMED. REBORN AS DOWNTOWN DC'S CREATIVE HUB.

PINNACLE AWARD 2026
MARKETING, COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENTS
SUMMARY

DowntownDC BID

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Anthem Row project, funded by a $1.1 million Streets for People Grant from the DC Office of Planning, transformed an underused pass-through corridor in Downtown DC into a vibrant art, culture and entertainment hub. Its purpose was to boost foot traffic, drive local business spending and accelerate downtown recovery post-pandemic by leveraging public art, festivals and immersive activations. Goals included increasing daily foot traffic to Downtown DC, building strong partnerships with stakeholders, generating revenue for stakeholders and Certified Business Enterprises (CBE) and positioning Downtown DC as a premier cultural destination. The program engaged residents, tourists, office workers, families and nightlife seekers through inclusive, free programming. Key components featured more than 20 activations, including rotating public art installations such as the National Mistletoe, Lunar New Year Lantern, Cherry Blossom Daruma and The Prism aerial sculptures. Interactive pianos, murals and live music and art brought energy to the public space. Larger festivals, including Art All Night and DC JazzFest Downtown, featured performances and mural battles. Permanent enhancements rounded out the effort with new seating, landscaping and aerial lighting. The crowning achievement was the GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS-setting "National Kiss Most Kisses Under the National Mistletoe" event where 1,435 participant couples shattered the record for most couples kissing under mistletoe (previous record being 480 couples). This reinvigorated Anthem Row as a dynamic gathering place, fostering economic vitality and community pride.

INNOVATION

The Anthem Row project reimagined a privately owned pass-through plaza as a people-first cultural gateway into Downtown DC's emerging 8th Street arts corridor. Rather than layering temporary programming onto an underutilized space, the project embedded arts, culture and entertainment into the plaza's physical infrastructure and long-term operating model. It transformed Anthem Row into a permanent connector between the Apple Carnegie Library and the United States Navy Memorial and a true front door to the corridor. The project's innovation lies in pairing high-impact spectacles with disciplined place management. In just 10 months, the team delivered more than 20 activations – murals, sculptures, aerial installations, live music, live painting and festivals – supported by permanent seating, landscaping and lighting that ensure the space performs daily, not just during events. The GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™-setting National Kiss event elevated the site globally, generating coverage in 600+ media outlets and more than 4 million social media views. It demonstrated that a downtown corridor can function as world-class civic infrastructure. With a 22% year-over-year visitor increase, $67,000 in adjacent business revenue and $430,000 in DC CBE spending, Anthem Row proves creative placemaking can drive measurable economic recovery while establishing a scalable model for reinvigorating urban corridors nationwide.

OUTCOME

The Anthem Row project achieved its core goal: Transforming an underused and overlooked pass-through plaza into a high-performing arts, culture and entertainment gateway along Downtown DC's 8th Street NW corridor. In its first 10 months, Anthem Row welcomed more than 159,000 visitors – a 22% year-over-year increase in foot traffic – demonstrating measurable success in converting underutilized space into a true destination. Increased visitation generated more than $67,000 in direct revenue for adjacent businesses and approximately $430,000 in spending with DC Certified Business Enterprise (CBE) vendors, advancing both economic recovery and equity objectives. More than 20 activations, including large-scale murals, sculptures, aerial art, live music, live painting and signature festivals, repositioned Anthem Row as one of DC's most vibrant outdoor cultural spaces. The flagship GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ National Kiss Under the National Mistletoe event brought together 1,435 couples, secured coverage in more than 600 media outlets, and generated over 4 million social media views, elevating Downtown DC's revitalization story to a global audience. Outcomes were measured using Placer.ai mobility data, point-of-sale and partner-reported sales, attendance tracking and digital analytics. Importantly, Anthem Row is designed for longevity. Permanent investments, including seating, landscaping and aerial lighting, ensure year-round usability, while the BID's ongoing activation strategy will continue to grow the corridor as a durable place-management asset beyond the initial grant period.

EXECUTION

The DowntownDC BID partnered with Livable City Group to deliver the place-management of the Anthem Row project within a compressed 10-month grant timeline, with Phase 1 executed in just six weeks to align with winter activation and the debut of the National Mistletoe aerial art installation. Phase 1 encompassed design, fabrication and installation of the aerial sculpture infrastructure, coordinated closely with adjacent businesses, property owners and city agencies to ensure safety and minimal disruption. A rigorous yet flexible implementation framework guided execution. Weekly stakeholder meetings, joint design charrettes and clearly defined decision milestones maintained alignment on scope, sequencing and risk management. When mid-project supply chain delays, design refinements and site constraints emerged, the team deployed a proactive mitigation strategy – advancing parallel design solutions, re-sequencing fabrication and phasing installation – to protect the schedule while preserving design integrity and visitor experience. Livable City Group's technical expertise in public-space delivery ensured high-quality project management and vendor oversight, while the BID led stakeholder engagement, fabrication coordination, installation oversight, programming and ongoing operations. The project was delivered on schedule and on budget, with no material variances, demonstrating that disciplined collaboration and adaptable problem-solving can transform complexity into a replicable model for high-impact downtown activation.

ENGAGEMENT/REPRESENTATION

The Anthem Row project reflects the DowntownDC BID's role as the local place management organization and convener, bringing together four ownership groups, retailers, restaurateurs, developers, artists and district agencies to co-create a shared vision. The BID led stakeholder coordination across planning, design, installation and event production – ensuring decisions were informed by property owners and businesses while centering local creative talent and DC Certified Business Enterprises (CBEs). For over 10 months, the BID engaged more than 50 regional artists and produced 20+ free public activations representing the cultural diversity of the District – from jazz, Go-Go, and Latin music to boxing, wrestling and wellness programming. Installations including murals, sculptures and aerial art were developed in collaboration with stakeholders and funded to prioritize equitable economic participation. The initiative generated more than $67,000 in direct support to business partners and $430,000 in revenue to DC CBE vendors, ensuring measurable reinvestment in local enterprises. Signature moments such as the Guinness World Records–setting National Kiss under the Mistletoe engaged 1,435 couples and nearly 3,000 attendees. By convening stakeholders and directing resources intentionally, the BID ensured economic opportunity, cultural representation and public benefit were shared across the community.

REPLICATION

The Anthem Row project provides a scalable roadmap that any district can adapt by starting with what they already have: An underutilized public or private space and a strong desire to collaborate. The DowntownDC BID convened four ownership groups, nearby businesses and the creative community to transform an overlooked pass-through into a dependable arts, culture and entertainment destination. Regardless of budget, staff size or district scale, the core framework remains the same: Identify an underused corridor, engage adjacent stakeholders early, and partner with local "experience makers" – artists, festivals and cultural organizations – rather than building every activation in-house. Consistent, free or low-cost programming helps "train" visitors, workers, and residents to view the site as a reliable gathering place. Strategic but simple physical enhancements, such as landscaping, movable furniture, lighting and public art, quickly shift perception and usability. Smaller organizations can begin with pop-up activations to test demand, layering in permanent infrastructure as momentum and funding grow. Larger districts can scale the model through more frequent programming, sponsorship integration, cross-promotion with anchor events and data tracking to demonstrate economic and social impact. Across all contexts, strong operational planning – maintenance, safety, staffing – and a flexible, partnership-driven mindset ensure long-term success and replicability.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

https://www.downtowndc.org/news/placemaking-in-action/

https://www.downtowndc.org/news/guinness-world-records-title-set-at-downtowndc-bids-national-kiss-under-the-national-mistletoe-event/