

The background of the slide is a photograph of a community garden or park area. Several people are visible, some standing and talking, others walking. There are trees, a path, and bicycles parked on the right side. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

**the
Neighborhood
DesignCenter**

Reimagining Vacant Spaces:

Creative Placemaking as a Tool for Testing, Connecting
& Growing Community Ideas

American in Bloom Conference

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What's the most interesting thing you've seen in a vacant public space?

A park? plaza? vacant lot? sidewalk? storefront?





Sculpture by MICA faculty in a vacant lot across the street
from my house in Baltimore City



the Neighborhood DesignCenter

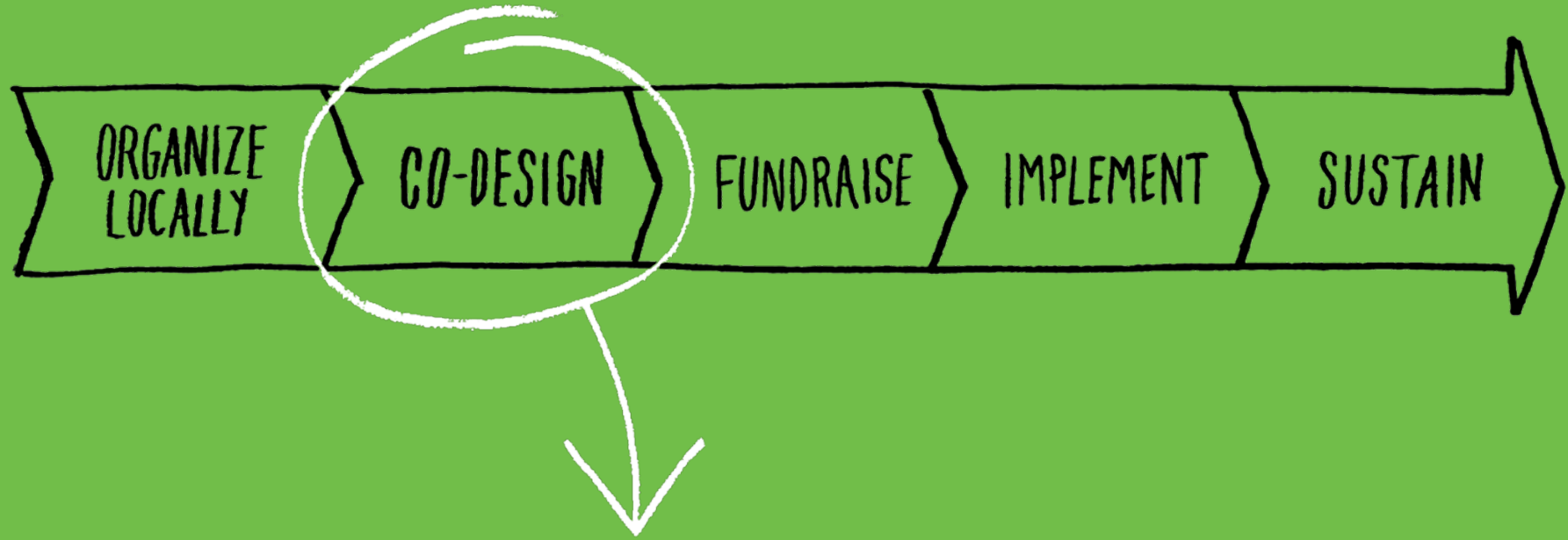
is a nonprofit that partners with community leaders to envision better parks, public spaces, streetscapes, main streets, and more. We help communities turn early ideas into places.

Learn more: www.ndc-md.org

NDCC believes

- Everyone deserves access to good design.
- The more inclusive and community-driven the process, the better the design.
- Well-designed places enhance healthy cultural and democratic life in our neighborhoods.
- Healthy places are built with consideration of social justice, environmental sustainability, and the true character of a place and the people who live, work, worship and do business there.





(and test early ideas!)

Our work often starts with...

- Vacant lots
- Underused corridors and parks
- Overlooked alleys and corners
- Neighborhoods in transition





**What do we do
with a space
that's stuck in
between?**

Not quite vacant.

Not quite activated.

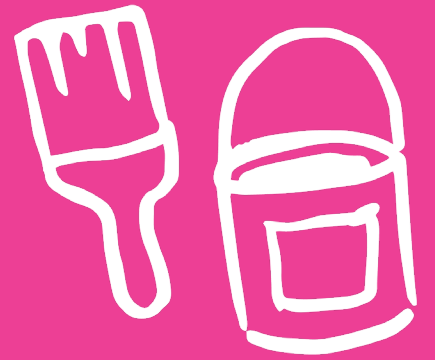
Not quite ready for investment.

What if vacant space isn't just a problem?

What if it's an opportunity to experiment with new ideas that build community connections, beautify neighborhoods, and support the local economy, in partnership with local community members looking for a little more support?



One might call that.... **Creative
Placemaking**

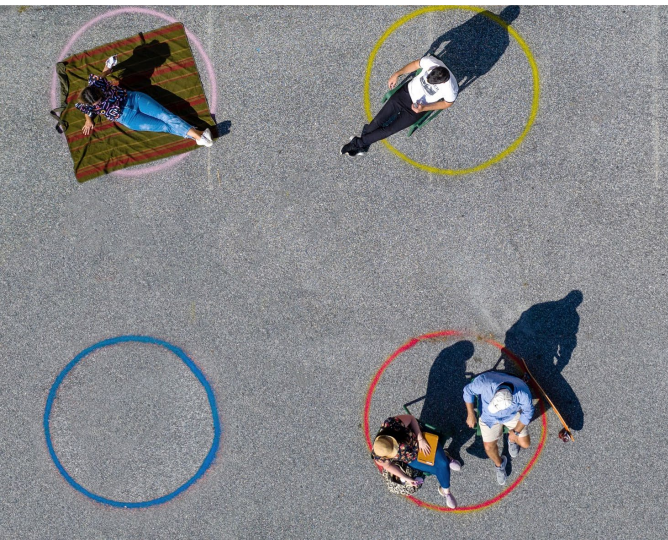


Which can look like **demonstration
projects** that serve as a **learning tool** to
build capacity, networks, and resources
around vacant spaces that feel **stuck**.



Creative Placemaking =

Starting small and working with artists, culture makers, visionaries, neighbors, and designers in your backyard!



- Collaborative brainstorm
- Test one idea
- Document what happens
- Gather feedback
- Reflect, learn, and share out
- Nurture partnerships
- Celebrate and promote
- Grow the idea together

#1

Community Build Days

Make change visible!
Make it participatory, accessible, and social

Work with a local trusted organization to
invite the whole block: businesses,
organizations, students, and residents



Vision is Yours BUILD DAY

What happens when the creative placemaking project is a hands-on build day at a neglected park during a conference when hundreds of folks are ready to stretch their bodies and ideas - putting conference concepts to work in real time!







Blooms & Beats Pop-Up Fest

What happens when the creative placemaking project is a full-day event activating a car-dominant, unfriendly strip mall with music, art, and activities?





7659

POLICE ARE
AUTHORIZED
TO ACT AS
AGENTS FOR
OWNER
ON BEHALF OF
A COURT

WELCOME
3rd
BLOCK
PARTY

THE WING
EXPERTS

BONELESS
MEAL
DEAL

20 BONELESS
FLAVORFUL

NEW
TEEN
22 BIG





Don't save the artist for the end.

Instead of: “We need an
artist to decorate this.”

Try: “We need artist and
designer partners to help
us explore what's
possible.”



Temporary Street Mural Demonstration

What happens when the creative placemaking project is a temporary ground mural installed during a neighborhood festival to build the case for a permanent street mural that helps calm traffic and beautify a busy intersection?







Make a Mock-Up!



Make the smallest version!

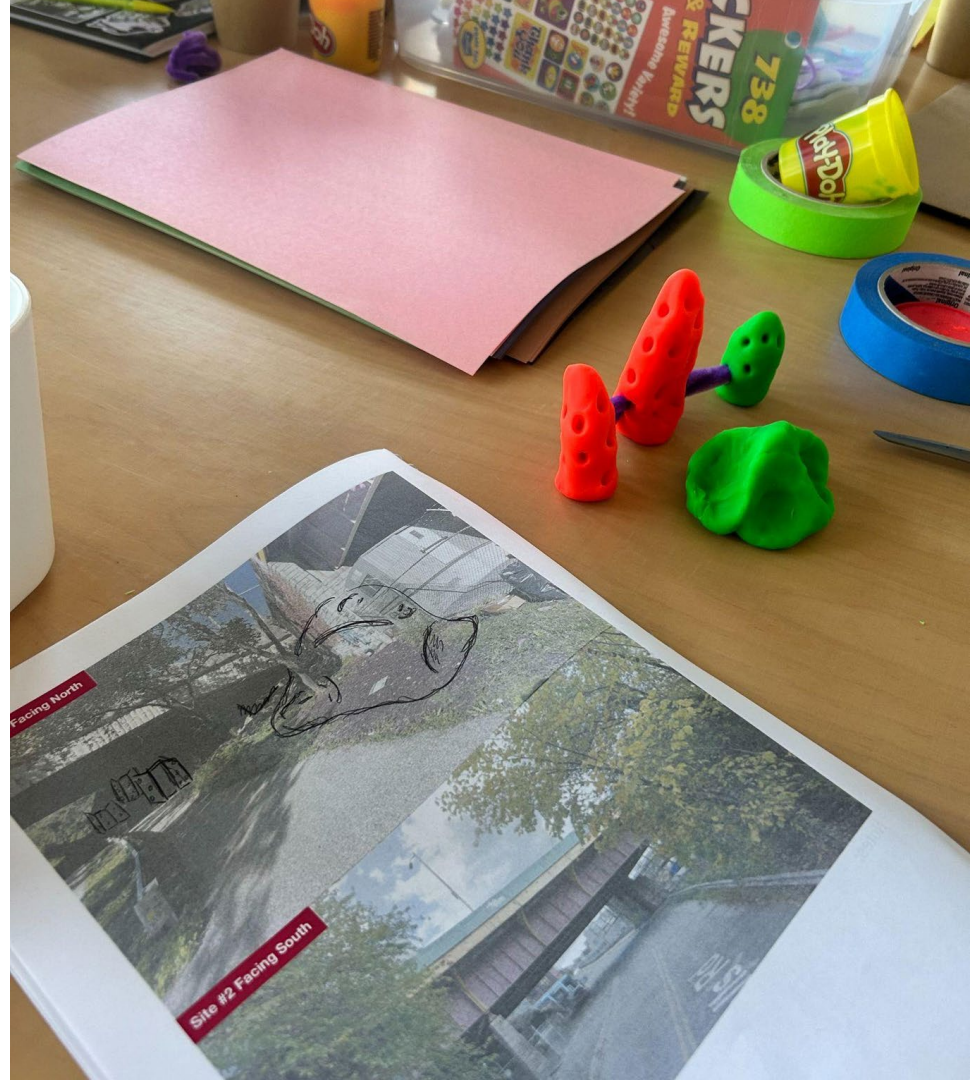
Digital mock-ups, paper collages, and mini sculptures help work through physical challenges and share your idea for initial feedback before it gets built.



Vacant Lot Sculpture Garden

What happens when the creative placemaking project involves abandoned industrial zones, but is led by local artists in partnership with neighbors and local university students who envision a whimsical sculpture garden?

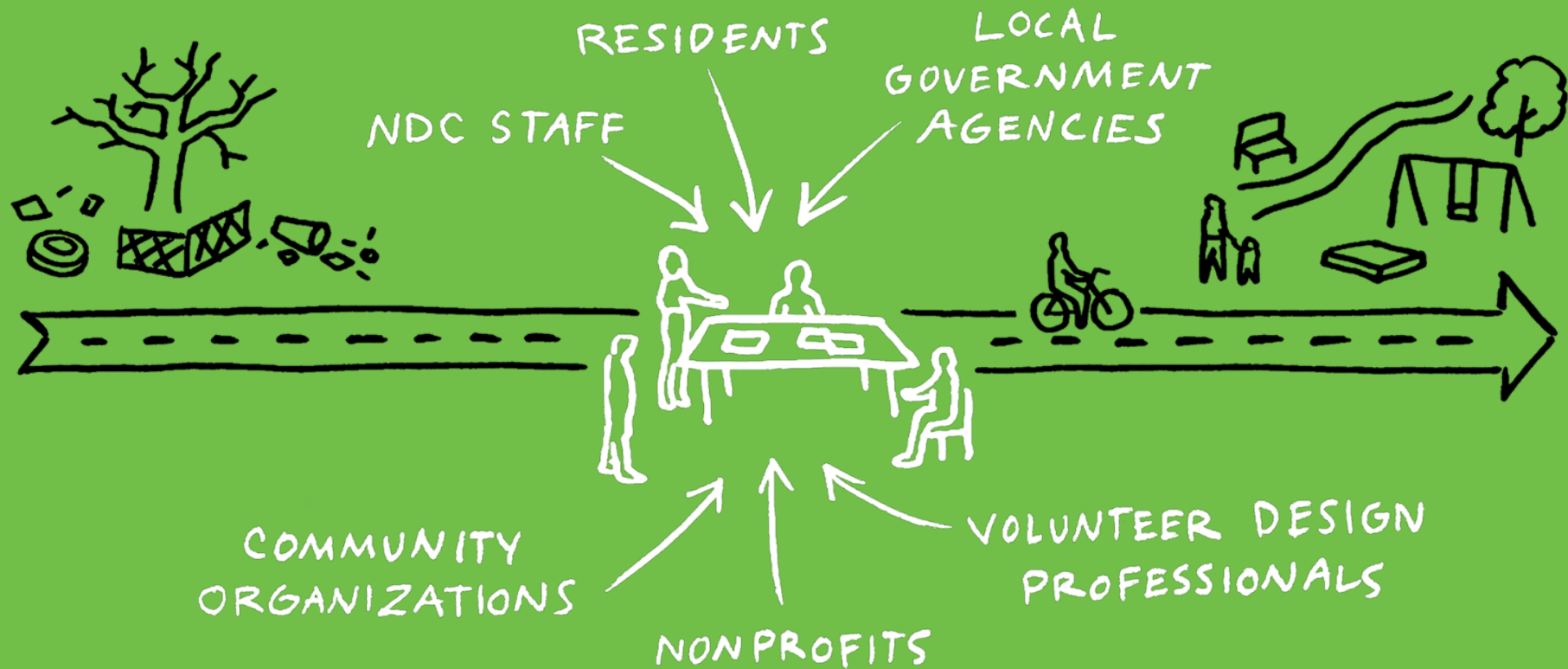




Build the coalition before you build the thing.

Who has a stake in this place?
Who has knowledge and ideas?
Who has resources? Who has
credibility? Who can open a door
that we can't?





Signal Station North & Inviting Light

What happens when the creative placemaking project is an engagement and research project that tests lighting ideas and builds a stronger application for a large public art project?









K&K

AB

Inviting
Light

LAFAYETTE

Marathon
M
Marathon
Regular 2.99
Plus 3.29

U-HAUL





GATSBY'S

815

TRIP

1813

And then...things didn't go according to plan!

The budget is over, the timeline got cut short, another intense storm crashes the day, permissions & permits weren't secured, partners are upset, neighbors are confused, the design doesn't really work on-site, it's done and no one....notices? So many surprises!!

(That's not failure - it's information for the next phase)

Lessons from testing ideas:

#1 Start smaller than you think

You don't need to solve everything for it still to be worth trying - in fact it's impossible!

#3 Invite local neighbors and artists in early

Local people, artists, makers, businesses, institutions are your partners and the ones who will ultimately be there to sustain the idea after the prototype is complete.

#2 Make something visible to spark conversation

People often need to see something to understand a vision and get inspired. A prototype can take an idea to the next level with less risk and investment.

#4 Plan for change and failure

Vacant spaces are vacant for a reason - something about that land, building, or corridor is not working. Demonstration projects are designed to change and evolve to meet unique and real challenges.

Use small wins to build momentum for vacant spaces



A small project can open a
much bigger conversation.



Think of a real vacant space in your area.

What assets do you already have? Who already has a connection to it? Who might have an idea for it? What's the smallest version you could try together?



Thank you - let's stay connected!



Sign up for NDC's **Newsletter**
to stay informed about
upcoming projects and events!

Visit the website at **ndc-md.org**

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