

RECIPES FOR CHANGE



BRINGING
NEIGHBORHOOD
PROJECTS TO LIFE,
BLOCK BY BLOCK

Involving Your Neighbors & Local Stakeholders

Most grassroots projects are about issues of collective concern, need all the helping hands and help with funding they can get, and benefit from the good ideas of a variety of people.

What is a stakeholder?

A stakeholder is anyone who will be impacted by your project. When you're thinking about who to involve, think about what your goals are. If your project is hyper-local, like cleaning up an empty lot on of your block, your primary stakeholders might just be your immediate neighbors. But if you're doing something in a school, then students, parents, teachers, and administrators might all be major stakeholders.

Whoever you choose to talk to initially, ask them who else you should be talking to! They'll help make sure you don't leave any important stones unturned.

WHO WE SPOKE TO:

Siphne Sylve
Memphis-based visual artist, musician, and DJ. Also Project Manager at the UrbanArt Commission, which employs artists to create meaningful public art that transforms spaces and environments across the city.



When should I start approaching people?

You can think through your whole plan—"this is my idea and how I see it unfolding"—and then ask for people's help, start by relating your idea only and ask for people's ideas to help make a plan, or think about how you're likely to be received in either case ("this person is crazy!" or "hmm, I'd like to get in on the ground floor of that"), and act from there.

How can I keep people engaged as time goes on?

Think and talk about your project in terms of what you're doing together—not what you're doing for your neighbors or vice-versa. This is a group effort.

Be open: to new people, new ideas, new outcomes. You're not a dictator! **Keep your focus on making positive change—not on getting your way.** If someone takes the time to critique your idea, thank them for their input and consider what you can get out of it.

And be open to new goals appearing: sometimes a project can change while it's in process and make it better than you imagined.

Don't try to badger anyone into participating. If people want to get involved, they will. If they don't, move on.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- “Building Communities, Not Audiences: The Future of the Arts in the United States,” by Doug Borwick
- “Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America’s Cultural Life,” edited by Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey
- The Philadelphia Mural Art Program has a great approach to engagement that’s worth studying

Siphne’s Tips for Involving Neighbors and Stakeholders:

1 Know what you want.



Do you want this person or group to help you build a raised bed for a garden?
To make phone calls for your fundraiser?
To introduce you to someone you want to talk to? People like clarity; make your “ask” clear every time you reach out.

2 Know what your stakeholders want

Why do you think this person or group is interested in what you’re doing? Tailor your pitch to speak to them. Your neighbor might be interested in a cleaner park because he takes his toddler there every day; someone from the mayor’s office might think more about how parks relate to the city’s environmental goals. Think through how you can reach different people with different points.



3 Talk to everyone directly.

Face to face is best, whenever possible!

4 Stay on the same page.

Start meetings by reminding people of your goals, then recap the progress you’ve already made and state what’s on the agenda to do next.

5 Understand your people.

Your group might prefer to use email to stay in touch—or maybe phone, text, or Facebook instead. Ask them how they like to work before you institute any systems.



6 Break it down.

If you’re working with more than a handful of people regularly, consider breaking your group into committees so you can focus on each of your tasks more easily, avoid super-long meetings, and make sure everyone feels relevant.