



Creating Coventry.

—A Guide to Community
Playground Master Planning





Introduction

When a representative from the City of Calgary alerted the Northern Hills Community Association (NHCA) that six of their playgrounds would need to be replaced, Moraig McCabe saw a bigger opportunity. All of Coventry Hills' 14 playgrounds were built in just over a decade. Surely they'd all need to be replaced in a similar period. If the community developed a playground master plan, what possibilities could they open for deeper community engagement and better playgrounds?

In the next 18 months, Creating Coventry brought together community groups, partner organizations, and municipal stakeholders in a series of engagements to learn more about the residents' hopes and dreams for these green spaces.

They found that creating an up-to-date picture of the community's priorities gave decision-makers confidence to support their requests. Having a neighbourhood endorsed plan in place can also put your community at the top of the list when funding opportunities arise.





The Journey

Think of this work in four buckets: **discover**, **define**, **develop**, and **deliver**. They work in order, but this kind of project needs flexibility to take advantage of times when community groups gather, or to work around things like summer break or the weather!

Discover: Identify the skills and gifts your community may offer. They will shape your project. Gather the latest information on your community's demographics and needs. Get guidance from groups who have gone before you. Recruit partners by painting a picture of the potential benefits to the community. Invite initial input from community members and organizations.

In Creating Coventry, NHCA leveraged Vivo's expertise in research and systematic observation, and tapped into volunteers from SPRY in the Hills to conduct the baseline of current Coventry Hills parks usage. These groups became key partners. The City provided recent demographic data, and the team learned from people who worked on the Haysboro Natural Playground. You may discover a different set of skills and existing data in your neighbourhood — and that's good.

Define: Review the information you have collected and look for trends and gaps. Whose voices are missing? Will any of the remaining work need outside expertise? Tap partner groups to connect with people you may have missed and to help facilitate the engagement.

At this stage, Creating Coventry had a rich variety of information from the City and the start of the parks baseline. They knew most of the current parks were traditional "tot lots", yet the demographics included primarily adults, with older children, teens and seniors. The observations also showed that many of those "tot lots" were very underused, so the Creating Coventry team embarked on a series of community engagements to learn what inclusive amenities looked like to Coventry Hills residents. A Calgary Foundation Neighbour Grant was applied for and secured to support this work.

Develop: By this stage, you'll have ideas for possible solutions or questions you need answered. Don't bring a polished model and ask people to sign off on it. Work with the community to provide answers and test and validate solutions. Bring loose photos, sketches, maps, post-it notes, and an invitation to dream.

This phase began by prototyping the playground engagement with the 3 Things for Canada Action Squads at the Country Hills Library. Creating Coventry then launched into a series of engagements with residents at Vivo, teens at Notre Dame and Youth Night, and seniors at SPRY in the Hills. They found these engagements weren't enough to create the master plan - they still had more questions. Instead of offering a report at Family Day, they tested and validated data from the previous engagements and posed additional questions around connectivity and the "why" of high or low playground usage.

Preparation paid off in opportunity again when Creating Coventry received funding support from the Canada 150 Social Research & Development Fund through the Community Foundations of Canada, McConnell Foundation and Government of Canada. This enabled the group to hire Kilometre Design to support data analysis, engagement design and reporting preparation. The next round of engagements captured the same demographics, bringing the voices heard to around 500. Copies of the engagement boards and guides, questionnaires, and data can be found in the Creating Coventry appendices on the Vivo and NHCA websites.

Creating Coventry brought maps and inspirational photos to these events, and even stickers for participants to put on maps showing where their ideas could go (stickers were a hit). These conversations took place in a fertile middle ground between being completely open-ended and prematurely focused on decisions.

Deliver: Show that this work will pay off. And when it does, celebrate the community's success.

Creating Coventry will launch the report to the community, City of Calgary and other partners in Spring 2018 and then continue with the process once prioritization of playgrounds is determined. The intention of this report is to capture general themes regarding parks design and connectivity, and the data that was collected to inform these from July 2017- February 2018. It is meant to be a starting place for redeveloping these green spaces over the next 10-20 years.

Community Engagements

June 2016

Initial Community meeting

Jul – Aug 2017

Facilitated design thinking exercise with Three Things for Canada Action Squads at Country Hills Library

October 2017

Backyard Dream World Cafe Workshops at Vivo

November 2017

Backyard Dream Lite inspiration and survey during Youth Night at Vivo

December 2017

Backyard Dream Lite inspiration and survey at Notre Dame High School

Backyard Dream Lite inspiration and survey with seniors at SPRY in the Hills

Dec 17 – Jan 18

Online survey

February 2018

Test and validate session at Vivo on Family Day

Test and validate session with seniors at SPRY in the Hills

Test and validate session during Youth Night at Vivo

The Secret Sauce

Put community at the centre: Start where people are now. Ask questions that let them tell you what matters to them. Be a great host by including food at events, and never underestimate the value of fun! Go to them to host engagements.

Bring people along on the journey: Be inclusive. Actively seek ways to broaden the circle of participants and leadership. Communicate to bring people along in the story.

- Document and share your work. This can be as simple as holding a short Facebook Live session at the end of events or meetings, especially if you ask questions online that participants will want to answer.
- Organizing your files makes it easy to bring others into the project.

Show (and be) trusted faces: Seeing community leaders and champions builds trust for a project. Know what tasks can be outsourced without changing the face of the project. Develop leaders within the community. Understand how to lead while stepping back to make space for others.

Recognize the value of partners: You need them. This is not a solo job. Partnerships should be reciprocal, with both sides contributing and benefitting. Look for:

- Partners who can connect you with audiences you do not reach. Ask partners for advice on how to engage the audiences they know.
- Partners will have skills you need. Prioritize finding a partner(s) that can legally receive grant funding as a non-profit or charity.

Be flexible: Things will change and that needs to be okay. Go where the community's energy is, not where you think it should be (or where your plan said it would be). Be ready for opportunities to present themselves. Doing this kind of work invites them.

- People may want immediate answers. Stay optimistic and flexible, and don't over-promise or say "no" too quickly. It's more accurate to say that what the community can get is a matter of the work the community is willing to do!





Key Partners and Contributors for Creating Coventry:

Northern Hills Community Association

Trusted organization representing the target community (Coventry Hills)

Link for City of Calgary Parks, Federation of Calgary Communities, Ward 3, Calgary Public Library - Country Hills Branch

Access to volunteers

Contact point for key audiences (SPRY, locals)

Able to receive some grants

Key stakeholder

Vivo

Trusted organization serving many people in the community

Content expert for applied research and creating more accessible community spaces

Able to receive different kinds of funding as a charity

Access to volunteers

Willing to dedicate staff time to the project based on shared mission

Key stakeholder

City of Calgary

Parks Department (Potential funder; Landowner and key stakeholder)

Ward 3 Councillor & office (Representation and community champion; Bylaws navigation; Local and citywide knowledge; Connector)

Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator (Connector; Resource)



SPRY in the Hills

Contact point for a key audience as the NHCA 55+ program partner

Volunteer systematic observers

Notre Dame High School

Contact point for a key audience

Federation of Calgary Communities

Experts in community engagement and urban planning

Connector

Volunteer facilitator

Parks Foundation

Subject matter experts

Potential funder

Volunteer facilitator

Haysboro Community Association

Content expert (playgrounds and community engagement)

Volunteer facilitator

Calgary Foundation

Key grant funder

Community Foundations of Canada/ McConnell Foundation/Government of Canada 150 Fund

Key grant funder

Kilometre Design

Planning, engagement, design, reporting

Mount Royal University (MRU)

Systematic observations and data analysis

Shoreline Homeowner Association

Key stakeholder for one park (around Coventry/ Country Hills Village lake)

Contact point for key audience (locals)

University of Calgary urban planning students

Volunteer facilitators

Community Residents and Participants

Partner Milestones*:

Feb – Mar 2017

Committed to partnership with Vivo

Introduced Creating Coventry plan to Parks liaison

Summer 2017

Received a Calgary Foundation Neighbour Grant

Systematic observations of 14 playgrounds and parks in Coventry Hills (completed by Vivo, MRU and SPRY in the Hills)

Project introduction to partner organizations and request for help sourcing volunteer facilitators

Dec 17 – Jan 18

Received a Community Foundations of Canada/McConnell Canada 150 grant

Reported back to SPRY in the Hills on how data they collected was used

Update to Parks Liaison

Feb – Mar 2018

Updates to Ward 3 and to Ward 3 Councillor

Working session with the YYC Civic Innovation Lab's Tiger Team

Creation of a summer parks activation plan

Creating Coventry plan to NHCA Board and approval

April 2018

Update to Parks Liaison and Shoreline Housing Association

Meeting with City partners

Report back to partner organizations and participants signed up for updates

May 2018

Creating Coventry community picnic and Jane's Walk to reveal plan to residents

*Creating Coventry reported back to the NHCA and Vivo boards regularly through this process

