PROJECT OVERVIEW

THE CURRENTS PROJECT

Currents: Engaging is the first in a series of idea documents undertaken by Sasaki’s Urban Studio. Born out of academic exploration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Currents project seeks to understand and articulate recent shifts in the design and construction of the public realm.

Successful public spaces often seem effortless. Giving the impression that they have been there forever, great urban places rarely reveal the complex host of factors that their creators faced—economic conditions, cultural forces, ecological realities, and more. To help make these broader trends in professional practice within the urban realm more visible, the Currents project explores five themes: engaging, researching, competing, withstanding, and programming.

WHY ENGAGING?

Nearly every public project conducted in the United States incorporates some form of public outreach. Based on the American ideal of a democratic process, typical engagement strategies often rely on the public meeting (à la the New England town hall) as the singular forum for policy and design decision-making. But today, in an increasingly global and digital era, these meetings often fall short of reaching the increasingly diverse and information-saturated citizens of today’s American cities. Or, the efforts fail to incite the interest required to achieve the long-term buy-in for planning and design strategies that’s needed to see a project through to successful implementation—to make a great urban place.

Successful projects leverage the process of outreach into sustained interest in project outcomes. Public process participants, in the most ideal scenario, become the champions of the project through the long road of implementation and the ever more daunting challenge of ongoing governance. In this way, engagement becomes a critical path toward both project realization and design excellence.

IN THIS VOLUME

In addition to inspired ideas, today’s urban realm planners and designers need to bring effective approaches to sharing information, gathering feedback, and building consensus. This volume illustrates a series of recent, innovative case studies curated within the following five categories:

PROCESS AS EVENT
Orchestrating the public meeting as a community celebration

ON THE GROUND
Bringing outreach to the community on its own turf and using the fine, local details of place to bring meaning and specificity to a process

REAL TIME
Utilizing online and gaming strategies to reach a broader demographic

QUICK WINS
Implementing design elements or prototyping experiences within the outreach process

ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS
Creating materials within commonly understood visual and cultural language

We conclude this volume with a case study on Sasaki’s Storming the Fort proposal for the Fort Mason Center Design Competition. This example layers together the five categories above and demonstrates the potential of these tactics when combined into a holistic process.
Civic engagement is no longer a given. With the long list of work commitments, social engagements, and family priorities that consume everyone’s schedules, it is increasingly hard to compete for attendance at a traditional public meeting. In addition, multiple planning studies often happen concurrently within a community, competing and compounding the problem of attracting attendees.

These trends mean that, today, to garner attendance and repeat interest, public meetings must be more than information sessions. They must be fun, entertaining community events that create a venue for celebration and reinvigorate the planning process. Projects featured here, including the Wicker Park Bucktown Master Plan and the Greater Des Moines Tomorrow Plan, embody this new approach. Both transcend the traditional public meeting, creating engaging social events that bring people together and create new excitement about the planning process.
WICKER PARK BUCKTOWN MASTER PLAN
INTERFACE STUDIO, PHILADELPHIA, PA

PROJECT SUMMARY

Home to local artists, musicians, writers, restaurants, and shops, and with easy access to downtown, Chicago’s vibrant Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods have attracted investors, developers, new residents, and national retailers. The neighborhoods are experiencing shifting identities as the success of revitalization brings new and rapid change. In an effort to retain the neighborhoods’ expressive—even gritty—characters, the Wicker Park Bucktown Special Service Area (SSA) engaged Interface Studio to create a master plan for street frontage along six commercial corridors totaling 13 miles.

The plan was intended to address the issue of identity and character. By creatively engaging the active, but often underrepresented, residents, business owners, artists, institutions, investors, and visitors, the team hoped to facilitate dialogue and develop a collective vision for the future of shared spaces in the two neighborhoods.

Interface Studio hosted a community open house in a vacant store. A three-week exhibition promoted the planning process, the plan itself, and the community. The approach was to make public engagement fun, and at the same time represent the creativity and spirit of the neighborhood itself. Highlights of the process included video storytelling, a photo suggestion booth, a budgeting game, a huge interactive map, and a storefront video installation that activated the street at night.

Beyond a unique engagement process, the resulting plan developed ideas for each of the six commercial streets. There was a strong emphasis on making the community more walkable and bikeable, creating new civic space, promoting local retailers, reinforcing the arts, and making the community the greenest in Chicago.

The Wicker Park Bucktown Master Plan was adopted in 2009.

WHY ENGAGING?

As professionals, Interface is at the forefront of reimagining the public meeting, bringing fun, rigor, and graphic design together in one place. In creating the Wicker Park Bucktown Master Plan, Interface brought the community together in a way that was compelling and successful—setting the bar for engagement.

For more information: WWW INTERFACE-STUDIO COM
THE TOMORROW PLAN
SASAKI, WATERTOWN, MA

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Tomorrow Plan is an unprecedented regional planning effort focused on the future sustainable development of Greater Des Moines, Iowa. The project pairs technical analysis of existing conditions and future trends with ongoing community engagement around priorities, trade-offs, and aspirations. Bringing together a number of recent area planning efforts, the goal of The Tomorrow Plan is to develop a vision for what sustainable Greater Des Moines will look like in 2050—and to lay out the steps to make it a reality.

Sasaki is leading both the technical exploration and interactive outreach components of the project. Sasaki’s bold project branding and comprehensive outreach approach have led to a distinctive project identity evident in all aspects of the planning. Frequent public activities and events showcase the multifaceted nature of the project including action-oriented open houses, The Tomorrow Plan Exchange blog (www.thetomorrowplan.com), national speakers, dispersed local public meetings, social media, educational webinars, a virtual town hall, and an interactive website with custom-made input applications.

On the technical side, Sasaki is coordinating a team of national experts projecting trends and developing an interactive scenario planning tool to help residents envision various possible futures for the region. Sasaki also is working closely with a regional consortium of 17 municipalities, four counties, and a number of other agencies and organizations in Greater Des Moines to guide the technical and outreach aspects of the project. When complete, The Tomorrow Plan will align multiple planning elements—transportation, land use, housing, economic and workforce development, and the environment—in a comprehensive framework for sustainable development.

WHY ENGAGING?

The Tomorrow Plan provides an example of the creative reinterpretation and contemporization of the traditional open house format to make the content more engaging for broad audiences. Activities at the project’s first open house ranged from online mapping activities, a feedback photobooth exercise, a live twitter feed projection, and larger than life brown paper drawings. The wide variety of programming allowed for a diversity of stakeholders in the Greater Des Moines community to participate in their own way.

For more information:
WWW.SASAKI.COM
ON THE GROUND
D.I.Y. AND TACTICAL PROJECTS

One challenge of traditional forms of public outreach is the location of the engagement. To increase potential attendance, many forums are planned in centralized locations—ones perceived as accessible to all community members. Despite a centralized location, these forums invite a host of other challenges. Centralized civic forums, like city hall, may be effective for political discourse but are much less suitable to visionary conversations or creative brainstorming sessions. Furthermore, many community members regard these forums with a degree of suspicion—as a place of predetermined decisions and status quo politics.

On-the-ground tactics move the conversation from static conference rooms and city halls to the places of vitality and gathering that already exist within the community. By going to where the people are, the process engages the community on their own turf, helping to dispel traditional hierarchies and enabling a more open dialogue. The projects featured here—including the Panhandle Bandshell, the Parkcycle, Safari 7, and the Casa Rosenda Flores—all positioned outreach within the immediate context of the planning challenge, engaging citizens within their own comfort zones.

Panhandle Bandshell, Rebar, San Francisco, CA
PANHANDLE BANDSHELL + PARKCYCLE
REBAR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

PANHANDLE BANDSHELL
PROJECT SUMMARY

The Panhandle Bandshell is a modular, movable performance stage made from repurposed materials—including 65 automobile hoods, hundreds of computer circuit boards, 3,000 plastic water bottles, French doors, reclaimed wood, and recycled structural steel.

In the summer of 2007, the Bandshell was installed in San Francisco’s Panhandle Park, where it hosted both impromptu and scheduled performances. In 2009, it was installed in San Francisco’s Fort Mason Center, accommodating performances and gatherings for a year and a half. It is currently in storage again—awaiting installation at its final, to-be-determined home. (Rebar is open to inquiries about permanent siting!)

PARKCYCLE PROJECT SUMMARY

The Parkcycle can be thought of as (almost) instant and mobile open space. Within an existing car-centric urban infrastructure, the Parkcycle temporarily reframes the right-of-way as found green space. The Parkcycle is human-powered and works within automotive boundaries of lanes and metered parking spots. It is an inventive, yet fully operative way to provide open space to neighborhoods that need it.

Rebar built the Parkcycle in collaboration with California-based kinetic sculptor Reuben Margolin. The apparatus debuted on PARK(ing) Day 2007 in San Francisco.

WHY ENGAGING?

Both projects—and Rebar’s work in general—demonstrate an active, playful, and contemplative understanding of the ways people use public space in the urban built environment. These on-the-ground techniques allow for communities to engage in public space in a new and fresh way. Rebar’s innovative and provocative approaches to bettering the built environment are inspiring.

For more information:
WWW.REBARGROUP.ORG
In 1999, Pedro Pacheco and Edmundo Palacios founded Diez Casas para Diez Familias—also known as 10x10. Through the program, students from the Monterrey Institute of Technology build homes for local low-income families using found materials.

In a cramped settlement in the Nuevo Almaguer neighborhood of Guadalupe, Nuevo León, Mexico, Maria Rosenda Flores was living with her two daughters and three grandchildren in a 250-square-foot room. A maintenance worker at the university, Maria was selected to receive a home from 10x10. To address the charge of using only found materials to create an ultramodern home, both the students and family had to innovate. The majority of the materials were sourced from the university’s campus. Completed in 2010, the home also harvests rainwater, uses greywater, and has a passive cooling system.

Pedro Pacheco and his students broke from the traditions of architecture design studios, which frequently focus on abstract problems, closed studio workspace, and imaginary clients. Instead, they participated in a true on-the-ground service learning experience. By engaging with a real client, the students created a significant amenity with an extraordinary efficiency of resources. The project was embedded within a real neighborhood context and used immediate, found materials—demonstrating the latent potentials of informal settlements throughout developing countries.

For more information:
HTTP://I2UD.ORG/2011/11/CASA-ROSENDA/
SAFARI 7
URBAN LANDSCAPE LAB @ COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AND MTWTF, NEW YORK, NY

PROJECT SUMMARY

Manhattan’s 7 line, also known as the International Express, runs through a diverse range of urban ecosystems, beginning in the concrete jungle of the city’s core and terminating in Flushing, Queens. Despite this exciting landscape, riders often disengage from their surrounds during their trip—distracted by iPhones or the stresses of the day.

The Urban Landscape Lab at Columbia University developed Safari 7, a self-guided tour of urban wildlife along the 7 line, which aims to engage a wide range of New Yorkers in active research and exploration of their own environment. Through podcasts and maps, Safari 7 enables riders to explore the complexity, biodiversity, conflicts, and potentials of New York’s ecosystems. Train cars become eco-urban classrooms; travelers become park rangers.

WHY ENGAGING?

A subway ride is routine for millions of New Yorkers, but it is rarely seen as an opportunity for learning. This project takes advantage of what is typically a mundane experience, and transforms it into a chance to expand community knowledge about the built environment and urban ecology.

For more information or podcast: WWW.SAFARI7.ORG
Despite valiant efforts to attract community members to public meetings, community leaders and professional staff express frustration over the turnout, often not nearly a showing of statistical relevance. And what attendance occurs is marred by other challenges. Those that attend often come with the hopes of venting opinions on other unrelated issues or pet causes. Studies show the demographic that attends public meetings—usually older—rarely represents the community cross section. Or the given attendee is a passionate introvert—full of ideas and opinions on the given topic, but uncomfortable sharing them within a largely public forum.

To combat these inequities, many communities are turning to online outreach forums that utilize websites, blogs, and social media to broaden the net and engage a wider audience. These forums tap into existing online social networks and operate in real time—allowing users to engage on their own terms and in their own time frame. Many incorporate elements appealing to a younger, elusive demographic, including gaming, blogging, and social media language. The projects featured here—Participatory Chinatown, EngageOmaha.com, and the Bridgeport Parks Master Plan—all use sophisticated and often custom online tools to enrich their outreach processes.

MyBridgeport, Sasaki, Watertown, MA
PARTICIPATORY CHINATOWN
ENGAGEMENT GAME LAB, THE METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL, ASIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, AND MUZZY LANE SOFTWARE, BOSTON, MA

PROJECT SUMMARY

Participatory Chinatown is a 3-D role-playing game that was developed as part of the master planning process for Boston’s Chinatown neighborhood. In the immersive game, real residents assumed the role of virtual residents and were each tasked with finding a job, housing, or place to socialize. Built into the game, elements such as language barriers or low-income levels might make the tasks more challenging to achieve—and also more realistic. Participants then walked through and commented on virtual proposed development sites. The game was an informative and popular part of the master planning process.

WHY ENGAGING?

Participatory Chinatown tackles one of the foremost challenges and critiques of using technology for outreach. Rather than allowing a user to take a single, familiar point of view, the game makes the process social and turns it into an opportunity to build empathy among users. By creating a platform where participants are asked to step into another constituent’s virtual shoes, the game helps build consensus among groups who would traditionally represent dissimilar interests. Additionally, the joint partnership among Emerson College’s Engagement Game Lab, metro Boston’s regional planning agency, a community development organization, and a local software developer represents a powerful combination of academia, government, and practice.

For more information:
WWW.PARTICIPATORYCHINATOWN.ORG
MINDMIXER
OMAHA, NE

PROJECT SUMMARY

Traditional forms of engagement result in a list of wants and needs—and often the buck stops there. MindMixer was founded on the belief that civic engagement could be far more effective. MindMixer is an online platform that facilitates conversations, poses problem-solving challenges, and encourages action-driven collaboration. These meaningful interactions can ultimately lead to offline action. Engagement becomes transformative and sustained.

One specific MindMixer project, Engage Omaha (www.engageomaha.com) has inspired robust engagement. Via this online platform, community members are connected to each other and to city leadership in a variety of ways. Participants come together around shared interests and concerns for the Omaha community at large through photo sharing, polls, and online discussion.

WHY ENGAGING?

On the Engage Omaha site, community members submit ideas and create conversations from the ground up. The people set the tone for discussion and dialogue. And all of this is possible on their own time and terms.

MindMixer appeals to a wide range of community members, and inspires them to stay engaged.

For more information:
WWW.MINDMIXER.COM
MYBRIDGEPORT
SASAKI, WATERTOWN, MA

PROJECT SUMMARY

MyBridgeport (a Sasaki MyCampus project) illustrates the process Sasaki strikes between technology and personal interaction in consensus-building.

Bridgeport’s waterfront location on the Long Island Sound and its many neighborhood parks are critical assets for the city’s revitalization. Thanks to the support of a mayor and city staff who embrace the importance of open space to urban sustainability, Sasaki was engaged to complete a parks master plan for the city to build on the recently completed BGreen 2020 sustainability plan.

A unifying tenet of the plan is that parks are for people. Ultimately, the plan is only successful if it increases citizens’ access and enjoyment of the parks. Bridgeport’s parks are diverse in scale and amenity, and its list of users is equally broad. Hence, broad public participation in the planning effort was truly important. By combining innovative technology tools with tried-and-true, face-to-face outreach, the Sasaki team developed a toolkit of innovative strategies to reach all user types, and ensured the plan responded to each of their needs.

Sasaki’s in-house digital strategists developed an interactive, digital mapping survey. This map was launched on the city’s website and distributed by neighborhood leaders, and enabled the team to gather important input from hundreds of citizens. The online outreach was complemented by more personal activities such as games with summer youth campers at Seaside Beach. Technology and personal interaction combined when the team conducted video interviews in the parks with park users. The video technology brought their voices and faces to life for a broader audience, enriching the traditional stakeholder interview process.

WHY ENGAGING?

Designed specifically for the Parks Master Plan, the MyBridgeport tool allowed citizens to express their likes, dislikes and ambitions for the city’s park system. Broadcast on the city’s existing homepage and advertised through multiple forms of media, the tool made this feedback mechanism accessible to a wide array of park users, enabling a broader level of engagement with the community.

For more information:
HTTP://PROJECTS.SASAKI.COM/MYBRIDGEPORT/
Another challenge of the planning process is time. Community members, in an age of increasing immediacy of information and news, are impatient for the tangible results of long-term planning. The traditional plan as the outcome of a planning process seems rigid and untested in a domestic culture that has witnessed a significant economic recession. Community leaders and constituents are leery of committing significant investment tomorrow in the ideas of today. Many are looking for ways of creating immediate value and verifying design potentials in real time.

Quick wins epitomizes this concept. Rather than awaiting the completion of a planning or design effort, quick wins suggests the immediate implementation of ideas or mid-process prototyping of experiences. By testing ideas during the design process, designers can adjust long-term plans to the observations of short-term, low-cost experiments. The projects featured here—the Seattle Waterfront and Orange County Great Park—both demonstrate the potential of an immediate, tangible quick wins within a broader planning process.
SEATTLE WATERFRONT
JAMES CORNER FIELD OPERATIONS, NEW YORK, NY

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Alaskan Way Viaduct on Seattle’s west side has long been both a physical and visual barrier between the city and its waterfront. The city engaged New York-based firms Field Operations and SHoP Architects, as well as Seattle firm Mithun to help revitalize this post-industrial embankment.

In response to a community meeting, Field Operations framed three scales of emphasis for the work:

1) City scale: Re-centers Seattle around Elliott Bay with the creation of a ring of parks and attractions, which in turn connect to a larger network of public spaces.

2) Urban framework scale: Connects the city to the waterfront with pedestrian connections, bike paths, and access to public transportation.

3) Waterfront scale: Creates “tidelines and folds” in the urban fabric to address topographical challenges and foster a dynamic relationship with the water.

To illustrate these three spheres, the team created site-specific installations that branded the site itself with yellow paint and signage. These dramatic quick wins attracted the Seattle community to come out to the site and be a part of its future development.

WHY ENGAGING?

Field Operations used quick wins and dynamic engagement on the site itself. The bold visibility onsite during the beginnings of the project attracted a strong community interest and involvement. These kinds of highly visual, illustrative engagement allow a variety of community members to envision the possibilities of design.

For more information:
WWW.FIELDOPERATIONS.NET
ORANGE COUNTY GREAT PARK
KEN SMITH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, NEW YORK, NY, AND
MIA LEHRER + ASSOCIATES, LOS ANGELES, CA

PROJECT SUMMARY

Orange floats! The former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station in Orange County, California, is being redeveloped as a 1,347-acre park—known as the Great Park—that will invigorate and provide rich learning and healthy living opportunities for the surrounding communities. However, this long-term project will take many years to build and come into its own.

In the meantime, the 27-acre Preview Park serves as a visitor center and observation area, as well as a prototyping space for elements to be integrated into the Great Park. Preview Park opened in 2007 with a large orange observation balloon, which rises 500 feet and provides encompassing views of the park’s development for up to 30 visitors carried in its gondola. The park has continued to develop with prototypical orange groves, stonework, plantings, and facilities. The park also hosts concerts, dances, workshops, and other events as a means of bringing the regional community to the site in the midst of the design process.

WHY ENGAGING?

Within the realities of long-term implementation, Preview Park provides Orange County with a satisfying taste of the future Great Park. It bridges the gap between our cultural proclivity for instant gratification and the long-term realities of implementation. The hot air balloon and vibrant programming has energized the community and invested them in the Great Park’s future.

For more information:
WWW.OCGP.ORG
GOVERNORS ISLAND
WEST 8, NEW YORK, NY

PROJECT SUMMARY

Governors Island in Upper New York Bay has a long history as a federal military reservation. West 8’s design for open spaces as a part of the reuse and revitalization of the park seeks to create “an icon for the city, a beacon in the harbor” (www.west8.nl).

As an island, the project site is only accessible by ferry—which leaves visitors to explore the 172-acre island by foot. West 8 took this potential transportation obstacle and transformed it into an advantage by designing an iconic bike prototype available only to park visitors.

WHY ENGAGING?

This strategy allows the community to engage in the park in a new and dynamic way, while protecting its precious, limited access. While bikes have always been allowed on the island, this unique, exclusive design helps capture the community’s attention and draws them into the island and its possibilities—both literally and figuratively.

For more information:
WWW.WEST8.NL
Public meetings have the challenge of language. Many times, design professionals come to public meetings armed with a specialized language of design and planning terms that are virtually unintelligible to the average community member. While the design professional’s responsibility is to gather feedback in a public meeting, often much of the time is spent explaining complex ideas and deciphering planning trade-offs. Further, specialized language is even more challenging to non-native English speakers who make up a significant portion of the American population.

To address the challenge of language, many public engagement processes are creating what we have defined as accessible materials. Rather than the usual boards or presentations that rely on planning and design jargon, designers are appropriating more commonly understood forms of visual and verbal language—like comic books, guidebooks, and newspapers—to illuminate complicated planning stories. The projects featured here—the Des Moines Water Works Park and “OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding”—both reuse traditional communication tools to explain complex spatial and physical ideas.
WATER WORKS PARK
SASAKI, WATERTOWN, MA, RDG PLANNING + DESIGN, DES MOINES, IA, AND APPLIED ECOLOGICAL SERVICES, PRIOR LAKE, MN

PROJECT SUMMARY

Water Works Park is comprised of 1,500 acres bisected by the Raccoon River and a three-mile-long infiltration gallery, which is a major source of drinking water for Des Moines. Des Moines Water Works, working in partnership with Iowa State University Department of Landscape Architecture, held an international competition for proposals to integrate the ecological and social functions of the park and river into a unified landscape, inspire the community, and generate discussion about watershed issues. The competition also called for solutions for ecological and recreational challenges specific to Water Works Park. Sasaki’s winning plan, developed in collaboration with RDG and Applied Ecological Services, imagines Water Works as a place of adventure and water experience that serves as entrée to a restored, easily accessible wilderness and beyond—to a river system, a watershed, and a new understanding of the role of everybody in the region’s water story. The park becomes a reimagined public space on the Raccoon River, where the dynamic floodplain, the engineered water systems, ecology, and active recreation come together.

Sasaki’s plan shapes two distinct yet complementary sections of Water Works Park: the wild and the engineered. The wild offers immersion into the park’s magnificent natural setting through activities like horseback riding, hiking, and exploration. The engineered is the active heart of the park and provides more structured outdoor activities and event spaces. The centerpiece of the engineered landscape is a recreational watercourse, experienced on standing paddleboards, that is linked to interpretive opportunities regarding the role of the site in harvesting and cleaning drinking water. The engineered landscape also connects to city streets, integrating the park with the urban fabric of Des Moines. Through a series of engaging experiences, the plan offers the potential to realize Water Works Park’s mission: to transform the way society thinks and understands the role of water in the region.

WHY ENGAGING?

As a part of the submission, Sasaki developed a visitor’s guidebook that presents their plan as the park’s reality. The guidebook illustrates how the plan is implementable and focuses on the community. Throughout the design process, the design team interviewed citizens, community leaders, focus groups, and stakeholders, and will continue engaging the public throughout the master plan and implementation process.

For more information:
WWW.WATERWORKSCIRCUIT.COM
OURS: DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF BRANDING
PROJECT PROJECTS, NEW YORK, NY

PROJECT SUMMARY

“OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding” is intended to inspire debate. The show features work in a wide range of media by over 40 international artists. But in design, the show consciously creates illusions of diversity and choice. For example, many objects appear in pairs—one red, one blue. But these seemingly different objects—newspapers, voting booths, even a website—are exactly the same with the exception of their color. The varied typefaces as well suggest diversity, but they are more similar than they appear as all are designed by Swiss type designer Adrian Frutiger.

“The exhibition design of OURS operates as a participatory framework, actively shaping and altering visitors’ experiences. Employing dislocative processes and visual form, the design strategy enacts the innate conflict in the democratic process between centralized control and individual choice.”
— OURS publication

WHY ENGAGING?

“OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding” tackles a complex issue of the democratic process through a common set of visual languages. Co-opting the visual language of the newspaper, the campaign button, and the iconic colors of the two national political parties, the exhibition enlists an accessible palette of visual cues in a sophisticated way to emotionally connect with—and, in many ways—jolt the participant.

For more information:
Five innovations in outreach—process as event, on the ground, real time, quick wins, and accessible materials—are described within this volume with a series of corresponding project examples. Though presented as discrete strategies, these tactics are most effective when employed as a layered approach. The most successful public outreach processes use multiple forms of outreach to engage the broadest possible array of constituents.

To demonstrate this principle and conclude this volume, this chapter focuses on a single project, Sasaki’s submittal for the Fort Mason Center Design Competition. In May 2012, Fort Mason Center launched an international design competition, seeking ideas to increase programming and visitation of this former military site turned impromptu art and event space in San Francisco. Twenty firms were invited to submit qualifications in a first round.

Sasaki’s submittal, though not selected, integrated many of the strategies discussed herein, reimagining a design competition as a public event rather than a closed-door design process, tapping into existing on-the-ground events, integrating online tools within the first phase, proposing prototyping of experience within the competition process, and integrating an exciting and accessible project brand.

www.stormingthefort.com
STORMING THE FORT
SASAKI, WATERTOWN, MA

PROJECT STATEMENT

To inspire a conceptual vision for the center, our team is planning a four-week public event/think-tank/design camp. During this time, the design team will form a studio at Fort Mason Center. We will curate a series of interactions with the place, guest experts, and the community, while also leaving significant time for closed team worksessions. The event will accomplish a number of objectives; it will imbue the vision with a strong grounding in the context of the site, enable meaningful and focused collaboration for the team and with the public, and raise visibility of the competition among the broader Bay Area community.

Leading up to the event, our team will initiate an awareness campaign, including the dissemination of various forms of publicity, including postcards, posters, and an online digital survey. The event itself, called Storming the Fort, will begin September 9 and conclude October 7. Structured around weekly thematic adventures, the event will include a repeating pattern of understanding (various forms of site tour), idea generation/prototyping (team worksessions), critique (visiting experts), public lectures, and open studios (public gallery). These interactions will all inform a forward-looking and feasible vision for the center, which we will document and present at the October 15 public presentation.

WHY ENGAGING?

PROCESS AS EVENT

The team reframed the design competition as a public celebration, inviting the public to participate in all aspects of idea generation and evaluation. Described as Storming the Fort, the public event included a range of public interactions—from site tours to public lectures to weekly open studios. The design team would inhabit the site throughout the four weeks of the design competition.

ON THE GROUND

In occupying the competition site, the design team would be able to more readily engage with existing public events and site interactions. The four-week public event/competition calendar was generated to capitalize on existing events occurring at the center. The design team’s open studios, for example, were scheduled to correspond with the site’s weekly food truck round-up called Off the Grid.
REAL TIME
The competition brief requested a digital-only submission for the first phase of qualifications. Building off this, the Sasaki team presented its entire submission through a comprehensive public event website. The qualifications were retold through the lens of this public event to inspire engagement in the first actions of the competition. The site would become a project portal throughout the process, where new materials would be presented and design team charettes and public lectures would be streamed.

QUICK WINS
Being onsite for the competition would allow the design team a unique opportunity to prototype experiences for the public—or, in other words, provide real-time, real-space examples of potential transformations of the site. To enable this, the design team included many innovative local practices known for prototyping experiences and design elements, including Rebar, Envelope A+D, and Words Pictures Ideas.

ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS
At the onset of the project, the design team created a unique brand and identity for the submission—giving the event a unique name and visual language. All materials produced for the first phase submission utilized this identity. Additionally, the design team co-opted the language of the event poster as an accessible way of explaining the competition schedule. Rather than a dry or traditional project schedule, the poster explains the key dates while reframing the story through the user perspective.

TEAM COLLABORATORS
Rebar, San Francisco, CA
Envelope A+D, Berkeley, CA
Words Pictures Ideas, San Francisco, CA

For more information:
WWW.STORMINGTHEFORT.COM
CREDITS

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE
CURRENTS IN THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC REALM [SEMINAR]

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Izabela Riano, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc.
Scott Page, Interface Studio
Nick Bowden, MindMixer
Tatiana Choulika, James Corner Field Operations
Pedro Pacheco
Erik Prince, Tom Leader Studio
Sean Corriel, 9/11 Memorial
Susan Silberberg, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Tim Marshall, ETM Associates, LLC
Hardy Stecker, Ken Smith Landscape Architect
Blaine Merker, Rebar
Lara Rose, Hargreaves Associates
Claire Agre, West 8

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Coelette Ember
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Nate Krohn
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