

SOUTH PARK: PROGRAMMING THE PROMISE

2016 IDA AWARDS SUBMISSION - EVENTS & PROGRAMMING

SOUTH PARK BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (SPBID)

BACKGROUND:

The South Park (SP) district of Downtown Los Angeles (DTLA) is undergoing a rapid transition. Once comprised of parking lots serving the LA Convention Center (LACC), the neighborhood hit its first major development wave in 1999 with the opening of STAPLES Center and L.A.LIVE, which included 20+ restaurants and retail. More recently, a second wave resulted in its booming status today: 17 mixed-use projects under construction and another 33 in the pipeline, totaling nearly \$4 billion in development.

Consequently, media and real estate professionals labeled SP DTLA's "hottest" and most "vibrant" neighborhood. However, instead of experiencing a robust urban network one witnessed very little pedestrian activity and pervasive vacant storefronts.

PROBLEM:

At the core of the problem was the behavioral pattern of SP's residential community, who developed habits of **venturing outside of the district** to shop, eat, and play. SP's earliest residents, predominately low-income renters, lived in an under-developed community and cultivated out-of-district spending habits. After SP's 1999 growth-spurt, the population grew as luxury condos went on the market. However, new residents viewed L.A.LIVE as a tourist trap, while old residents viewed it as unaffordable, resulting in a community that spent its money elsewhere. Without locals, businesses suffered - even closed - ultimately scaring away prospective retailers.

SPBID realized that it needed to **change resident behavior before its population tripled by 2018**. SPBID knew it could not force new habits with a "build-it-and-they-will-come" mentality and set out to **find authentic ways to engage, educate, and reshape resident behaviors across all demographics through experiential-based programming**.

SOLUTION:

SPBID looked to its residents for direction on how to change deeply-embedded habits by inviting them to share feedback through surveys and meetings. The results revealed interest in events that were **free** and involved **art**. Informed by this feedback and understanding that to cultivate **new habits**, the programming needed to be consistent, replicable, and no/low cost, SPBID implemented five innovative series:

- "Green Carpet" Business-Of-The-Month
- "Art in the Park"
- "Meet Your Artist"
- Experiential Art
- Resident Block Party

DETAILS:

"Green Carpet":

With a wide variety of businesses, SPBID created a replicable program template serving businesses from mom-and-pop stores to large entertainment venues commonly seen at L.A.LIVE. From marketing to implementation, the program exists at **no new cost to SPBID**.

The program today is both a SP and DTLA-wide "must attend" community event. From its conception, the series resulted in an average of 94% attendees who indicated they were likely to return to the featured business. Due to this success, events are **booked 6 months in advance**.

THE PLACE TO BE



SOUTH PARK

Program examples include:

Cultivating Neighborhood Habits:

SPBID worked with various stakeholders to construct one of the City's first parklets, strategically built in front of seven new retailers. On the parklet's opening day, SPBID partnered with one of the businesses to program a Green Carpet event, resulting in a 22% increase in sales that day. By connecting the parklet with a surrounding business, the program demonstrated how residents can optimize community assets. This proves to be a lasting behavior today: the parklet is rarely void of people and businesses' sales are climbing.

Re-activating a Forgotten Public Space:

Frustrated by a lack of locals attending events at LACC, SPBID partnered with the Auto Show to facilitate a free, resident-only "VIP Preview." SPBID strategically programmed the event *outside* of LACC on an often-barren public plaza, demonstrating the various ways the space can be programmed and utilized for public use. The event attracted a record amount of residents (67% of attendees) and successfully altered old behaviors by activating this once-ignored community asset.

Bridging Residential Area to Entertainment Hub:

Determined to address L.A.LIVE's notorious reputation as a tourist trap, SPBID programmed a series featuring various restaurants at L.A.LIVE. In one striking example, residents were invited to enjoy free food and drinks at DTLA's newest Chinese restaurant. Over 77% of the 150+ attendees visited the restaurant for the first time and are now frequent customers.

"Art in the Park":

SPBID programmed a series of free art classes, strategically hosted at a public park that is usually empty and perceived as unsafe. The classes were fully booked, largely by people who had no prior knowledge of the park. Local artists – including SP residents - began offering to teach classes and got more involved. Today, other organizations have started programming the park with other community events, including a free outdoor movie series.

"Meet Your Artist":

SPBID initiated a free series featuring Q&A with a neighborhood-contributing artist, hosted in the district's overlooked art galleries. While the series educated residents on their community's art, the program also fostered dialogue amongst differing demographics about the transition the district is undergoing. Due to residents' interest and connection to the public art, SPBID created wayfinding maps for self-guided art tours, which now provide a road-map for exploring ones' own neighborhood.

Experiential Art: Construction Fences:

SPBID launched an innovative, replicable art program in partnership with a local elementary school that was without an art curriculum to creatively deter construction fence graffiti. The program consisted of identifying a local artist to lead a series of art classes for students, resulting in a culminating event where the fence was installed and students continued to monitor the results. Over the course of the last five months, tagging was reduced by 98%. The program was featured in several news outlets and the fence is now a local attraction. Today, SPBID uses this successful template to guide other developers to replicate this program at their sites.

Resident Block Party:

SPBID **closed and activated a city block** for an evening programmed with free live performances and art exhibits for nearly 500 residents. Results and feedback were so positive that SPBID is now exploring a programmable park at the same location and plans are in place to replicate the event annually. Several community organizations requested to sponsor the next event because of how effectively it engages residents.

RIPPLE EFFECT:

Witnessing the dramatic success of SPBID's series programming model, other local institutions began to utilize the same approach of regular, free events:

- **L.A.LIVE's Summer-In-the-City Series** brings thousands of people to an outdoor plaza for crafts, and discounts.
- **LA Art Show** activated LACC's public plaza with art installments and saw its highest attendance with 60,000+ attendees.
- **Regal Cinemas L.A.LIVE** started a free "Family Day" series, themed around a family-oriented blockbuster.
- **Nike 3ON3**, once hosted in a confined parking lot, programmed its' events out of L.A.LIVE and into the SP neighborhood.

PROMISE IN PRACTICE:

By implementing various programming series to encourage residents to change their behavior and explore their neighborhood, SP is now living up to its expectations of vibrancy and activity. Since SPBID started its series of events, **retail lease rates climbed by 36%** per square foot and **20+ new retailers** moved into the district. The numbers are a clear testament to neighborhood activity; the product of SPBID's five new engagement-based event series.

With revitalization taking off in city-centers across the nation and world, SPBID's replicable model of low-cost programming ensures residents will develop neighborhood-driven spending patterns that successfully partners with new and ongoing development.

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