

Artist-Led Public Outreach and Community Engagement

Rebar designs, develops and implements innovative artist-led public outreach programs to support civic planning and design efforts. As designers and artists working in the public realm, we understand that an informed and engaged public is essential to reaching visionary design and policy goals. In our experience, often the best way to engage people at various stages of the design process is through creative, hands-on, participatory projects that spark the imagination and help build constituency. Using a variety of tactics to test concepts at full scale, including public events, temporary interventions, and emergent happenings, Rebar's artist-led programs rewrite our shared understanding of what's possible in both the design process and the built environment. While traditional public meetings and opinion polls will always be important part of the public process, artist-led outreach and engagement offers a powerful way to engage populations who are often left out, educating the public at the same time as it captures local knowledge and insight. Most importantly, it keeps the process of urban change exciting, open and fun.

Our method is based on an understanding of city life where people's sense of place is shaped by their movements through it, their habits, routines, and actions. By crafting events in public space, we help participants re-imagine the possibilities for places that might otherwise seem ordinary, pre-determined, or exclusively controlled by the experts. We create opportunities to connect with the joy and wonder of shaping public space in light of the opportunities presented by new plans and projects. We help incubate potential programs by testing "rough drafts" in low-stakes, reversible installations, interventions, and trials. By testing planning concepts and incubating program ideas we both generate useful public feedback that can inform strategic planning processes while building a constituency for future development initiatives. The result is a public that is more literate, empowered, and open-minded about their environment and the political process that shapes it and a planning and design community that is informed by and connected to their constituency.

As a part of the community organizing process, we work with our clients and partners to identify key stakeholders and map the social landscape in the lead up to public activities. We leverage existing local organizations, arts and education groups to improve and expand participation. We use social networking tools, branding and graphics to make participation itself a currency in the marketplace of spatial ideas.

Relevant experience and clients:

- **Park(ing) Day (Worldwide)**
A global, annual event that empowers citizens to temporarily transform parking spaces into parks, this project was initiated by Rebar in 2005 and has since involved over 500 cities, 1500 Park(ing) installations, and thousands of participants. The open-source approach has been used by organizations, government agencies and grassroots movements on six continents, and continues to support public education and engagement around the arts and public space each year.
- **Central Corridor Public Art Plan (Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN)**
Rebar is mobilizing and educating the public through a series of happenings and events along an 11-mile corridor to envision new opportunities for public art and build community support for the Central Corridor Public Art Plan that encompasses the Minneapolis-Saint Paul linkage.
- **Dédale, "Blades of Grass", a City-Wide Public Engagement Strategy (Paris, France)**
Rebar developed a participatory engagement strategy for the French cultural organization Dédale that included a public bicycle tour and interactive sculpture that turned participants into moving "blades of grass" across the city. Produced as part of a Rebar residency in Paris.
- **Southern Exposure Gallery, "Commonspace" (San Francisco, CA)**
A year-long commissioned artwork engaged the public in guided explorations of San Francisco's privately-owned public spaces in an effort to better understand this unique new city typology. Video and text documentation of the project fed community forums involving planners, city officials and designers, leading to policy initiatives providing new funding and guidelines for using these spaces.
- **ExperimentaDesign & Droog, "Bushwaffle" (Amsterdam/San Francisco/Cambridge, MA)**
Commissioned for art exhibition in Amsterdam, Rebar designed and fabricated fun inflatable urban furniture that encourages social interaction and led public events throughout the city to test them. Rebar also designed public programming using Bushwaffle for San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the Harvard Graduate School of Design.
- **City of San Francisco, Better Streets Plan Outreach Concepts (San Francisco, CA)**
Rebar developed concepts for public participation "spectaculars" in support of the city's Better Streets Plan document, including red carpet crosswalks, celebrity crossing guards, and surprising illuminated highway signage.