

Introduction

WHY we engaged community and WHO we centered in the process

Kimzin Creative and Petaluma River Park Foundation co-designed 10 community workshops that engaged people directly in the planning and development of the Petaluma River Park—a new 35-acre park being built in the heart of Petaluma, CA. A total of 619 community members contributed their dreams for the River Park’s spirit, operations, programming, and facilities or features. All engagements were crafted to develop authentic connections with equity priority populations and actively listen to community needs and desires. Equity priority populations include BIPOC communities (i.e., local Indigenous peoples, Latino/Latinx, Black, Asian or AAPI), people with disabilities, unsheltered individuals, elders, youth, and LGBTQIA2+ communities.

Engagement Descriptions

WHAT we did and HOW we did it

All 10 engagements were implemented in Petaluma between July 2023 and February 2024. The engagements applied extensive arts-forward activities, custom-built to immerse community members in the River Park's planning and design process. Engagements were designed based on three immersion levels: light engagement (e.g., completion of surveys at public festivals), multi-touch engagement (e.g., participation in artist workshops), and in-depth and ongoing engagement with Community Park Designers. The Community Park Designers (CPDs) are a group of 15 diverse representatives from cross sections of our community that live, work, or play in Petaluma. The CPD's are tasked with imagining, visualizing, and advocating for the Petaluma River Park that will benefit our local community.

Three engagements were facilitated with Black-identified middle and high school students, one engagement was facilitated with LGBTQIA2+ individuals, and two were conducted at larger community festivals (i.e., Rivertown Revival Festival and Petaluma Health Center’s Annual Health Fair).

Three of the eight community engagements were specifically designed to engage 15 Community Park Designers. Engagements focused on (a) building community amongst the CPDs, (b) diving deeper into the Petaluma River Park’s history, location, and leadership, (c) dreaming about the Petaluma River Park of their hopes and dreams, (d) and exploring the opportunities and constraints of the land. Kimzin Creative used poetry, guided imagery, drawing, and photography as data collection tools.

Engagements #1 and #2 took place at the Rivertown Revival Festival and outside of St. Vincent Church at a Health Fair produced by the Petaluma Health Center. This was a light touch engagement that used a vinyl banner titled “I wish this could be | Deseo Que Este Sea” as the participatory data collection method. 486 participants wrote their thoughts, feelings and hopes for the park on stickers that were then placed on the banner. The data collected was subsequently cleaned, and entered into a spreadsheet, where it was analyzed.

Engagements #3, #5, and #7 were specifically designed for Petaluma River Park’s Community Park Designers. The first engagement at the Petaluma Community Center focused on building community amongst the CPDs and providing an overview of CPD roles and responsibilities. The second was a virtual information session that provided an overview of Petaluma River Park’s history, location, and leadership. The third engagement involved a guided tour to help CPD’s dream about the Petaluma River Park of their hopes and dreams, and explore the opportunities and constraints of the land. These engagements allowed for a wide range of artifacts to be collected, including drawings, poems, conversational data, and photographs of the park taken by the CPDs. A mixed-methods approach was utilized to derive key perspectives and desires from the CPD population.

Engagements #4, #6, #8, #9 were titled “*Poems. Parks. Placemakers*” and took place at the Petaluma Christian Church and the Petaluma Arts Center. A total of 61 community members participated. These engagements were co-produced in collaboration with artist Kayatta, the PBCD’s (Petaluma Blacks for Community Development) Grapevine Youth Leadership Team, Amor Para Todos, and Petaluma Pride. Using an in-depth arts-based approach, Kimzin Creative along with Kayatta guided activities in various forms of poetry and artistic expression, allowing participants to express their hopes, dreams, and desires for the park through various possibilities and avenues for creative liberation.

Engagement #10 involved the creation of a bilingual coloring workbook as a data collection tool. A total of 57 students, grades 3-8, contributed their ideas for their dream park. Coloring Books were distributed in collaboration with (4) Petaluma-based Boys & Girls Club sites as well as, BlueZones Petaluma, McDowell Elementary, and COTS (Committee on the Shelterless). A second set of 43 bilingual coloring workbooks will be analyzed and incorporated into the data in the next data collection phase.

Each engagement had the following participant/response count as follows:

Engagement Number	Engagement Name	Immersion Level	Number of Participants
Engagement #1	Rivertown Revival	Light Touch	373 Participants
Engagement #2	St. Vincent Church	Light Touch	113 Participants
Engagement #3	CPD Engagement #1	In-depth and ongoing engagement	13 Community Park Designers Participated
Engagement #4	Poems. Parks. Placemakers	Multi-touch engagement	8 Total Workshop Participants
Engagement #5	CPD Engagement #2	In-depth and ongoing engagement	13 Community Park Designers Participated
Engagement #6	Poems. Parks. Placemakers. X2	Multi-touch engagement	9 Total Workshop Participants
Engagement #7	CPD Engagement #3	In-depth and ongoing engagement	14 Community Park Designers Participated
Engagement #8	Poems. Parks. Placemakers. X3	Multi-touch engagement	13 Total Workshop Participants
Engagement #9	Poems. Parks. Placemakers. X4	Multi-touch engagement	31 Total Workshop Participants
Engagement #10	Coloring Books	Light Touch	57 Total Responses
Total Number of Participants			619

Methodology

How we came up with the community's priorities

We analyzed the data using a qualitative and quantitative approach. The qualitative process focused on using thematic analysis to inductively create key “themes” from the data we collected during the engagements. We subsequently used computational text-mining techniques from which co-occurrence networks emerged. The use of co-occurrence networks highlights commonly occurring phrases, suggests key relationships between feelings, actions, and places/people/things, and allows for additional qualitative conclusions to emerge.¹ Topic modeling was done using Latent Dirichlet Allocation, a generative multi-dimensional probabilistic statistical model meant to assign keywords to categories. It is a computational analog to thematic analysis, intended to infer potential thematic results not gathered through qualitative analysis alone. Frequency charts were also used to highlight key words and phrases to give additional context to the nature of the data and to further understand participants’ hopes and dreams.

The final list of themes took both of these computational and analog method results into account. Key “sub-themes” emerged from the data analyzed after each engagement, ranging from 2 to 10 “sub-themes” total. Of these “sub-themes,” the key selection of 18 total “themes” were derived, with three headers of “meta-themes”: **The spirit and values of the park, the activities in the park, and the features of the park.** Below, we describe the community’s priorities for the park.

¹ Data analysis was conducted using KH Coder, a free text-mining software written in the R programming language.

Community Priorities

What emerged as collective dreams for the park

The spirit and values of the park

1. **Accessible and intergenerational:** the park wants to be an accessible public space that supports meaningful intergenerational play, dialogue, and recreational programming for people of all ages, abilities, and generations.
2. **A multicultural space of belonging:** the park wants to be a space of belonging that invests in the health, safety, and wellbeing of Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQIA2+, multilingual, unsheltered and other marginalized communities.
3. **Sustainable and green:** the park wants to foster a sustainable community with well-designed green spaces that protect native plant species and promote local biodiversity.
4. **Safe and versatile:** the park wants to be safe and have complementary spaces for visitors to relax, refresh, and renew in quiet or active and social areas based on their interests, needs, and desires. All areas have clear signage, lighting, safeguards, and safe pedestrian infrastructure.
5. **Comfortable and clean:** the park wants to have comfortable shaded areas and seating, available drinking water, clean public restrooms, and a clean aquatic ecosystem.
6. **Artistic, cultural, and creative:** the park wants to create and exhibit art that connects, heals, and inspires individuals and communities.
7. **Rooted in history, ancestral and indigenous knowledge:** the park wants to acknowledge past generations, listen to the original stewards of the land, and embrace its indigenous roots.

The activities in the park

8. **Blue and green activities:** the park wants to offer free blue recreational activities (activities that happen on or around the water) such as kayaking, canoeing, and paddle boarding as well as green activities (activities that happen on land) such as soccer, volleyball, and basketball.
9. **Wellness activities:** the park wants to facilitate wellness programs that engage the mind and body to reduce stress and improve mental health outcomes.
10. **Educational activities:** the park wants to offer education on both the ecological and environmental properties of the land as well as the history of local and underrepresented communities that have shaped and influenced the Park.
11. **Cooking activities:** the park wants to offer a space where individuals can cook and eat outdoors with friends and family.
12. **Volunteer-based activities:** the park wants to offer volunteer opportunities for community members to construct, participate in, and maintain the park.

The features of the park

13. **Places to Play:** The park wants to have places to play such as a playground for children, nature play areas, and outdoor fitness stations for adults.
14. **Places to Learn and Share Culture:** The park wants to have places for learning and culture such as an amphitheater and outdoor spaces that can be used for performances, lectures, and concerts from local artists and community members.
15. **Places for Pets:** The park wants to have places that foster a sense of community between pets, pet owners, and each other such as a dog park.
16. **Places for Food:** The park wants to have places for food such as a community garden that is well maintained by volunteers and food insecure community members who can benefit from organic foods such as fruits and vegetables.
17. **Many Ways to Get There:** The park wants to have easy walkability, bikeability, and access to transportation that ensures that visitors can reach the park safely, reliably, and conveniently.
18. **Better Connections:** The park wants to have better connections to surrounding communities and within its boundaries such as a bridge that connects the Peninsula area of the park and Hopper area, facilitating walkability and bikeability between the two lands.