

BOWTIE YOUTH COUNCIL

Case Study

Clockshop and The Bowtie Parcel

Image By Clockshop

Background

Clockshop

The Bowtie Youth Council (BYC) is part of a broader outreach and engagement effort in conceptual design for the future Bowtie Park Project. The Bowtie parcel, the next urban state park, is an 18-acre strip located along the Los Angeles River in North East LA. The project is being led by Clockshop, an arts and culture nonprofit working to shape the future of the city. The objectives of the BYC are to support youth engagement in the outreach process by coordinating outreach events with Los Angeles youth. The program seeks to develop the youth's skills in collectivized decision making, meeting facilitation, and other leadership skills.

The BYC was designed to be executed in-person and on-site, but like all programs in 2020, had to adapt to an online format. With Clockshop's decades-long experience engaging with youth, they modified the program to meet the needs of the council. COVID-19 presented unique challenges when connecting with youth, but despite the challenges, participants were able to produce a successful outcome.



Impact Story

Starting from 50+ applicants, Clockshop selected ten young adults to participate in the yearlong engagement process from September 2020 – September 2021. To initiate the engagement process, the council developed their own goals and mission statement to drive their outreach efforts. Additionally, the council learned about local government processes and issues related to open spaces. These lessons equipped them to engage in conversations around urban planning, environmental racism, and access to green space. During their time on the council, BYC members gained valuable experience practicing skills such as:



- Meeting facilitation
- Agenda building
- Collective decision-making
- Community outreach
- Survey analysis
- Creating informative presentations

With these skills, BYC members supported phone call outreach and connected directly with residents in the neighborhoods surrounding the Bowtie. They regularly engaged the designers of Bowtie with the feedback they heard from the community. The council also planned and coordinated a series of virtual town halls. From writing and designing the flyer to making the PowerPoint presentation, the BYC demonstrated their ability to lead.



10 youth ages 15-20 participated in the council, their participation compensated through honorariums



3 virtual town hall events produced and facilitated by the BYC members



350 + responses received for the general outreach survey from respondents 24 and under



10 guest speakers about urban planning, environmental racism, and the government's role in green space in Los Angeles.

Developing a Youth Council

The Bowtie Youth Council was developed out of several years of programming with youth in the community. Clockshop had strong connections to numerous educators and schools which would provide them with the outreach necessary to find council members. Another essential relationship for the BYC was with California State Parks (CSP). There were State Parks staff that attended select meetings with the council, which was essential for the council's final suggestions to be recognized by CSP. A strong prior relationship with CSP was necessary to engage State Parks in the project.



Stephanie Campbell, Manager of Planning, Public Affairs and Community Engagement for the Angeles State Parks District at CSP was heavily involved with the youth council program. Campbell stated "Clockshop has been such a strong programming partner for State Parks in Los Angeles over the past 8 years. I am continually impressed by their innovative approaches to engagement in public space. The Bowtie Youth Council is an inspired example of involving youth in the planning and outreach associated with park development projects. The value of youth voices should never be underestimated. The BYC challenged long standing approaches to park management, design and public safety in a sharp yet thoughtful manner that really made us step back, take notice and think about how we might do things differently at the Bowtie." Stephanie emphasized the reciprocal trust that State Parks and Clockshop have built over years of collaboration, enabling them to execute such an innovative program. Therefore, a strong prior relationship with CSP was necessary to engage State Parks in the project. Overall, Clockshop suggests a minimum of three years of youth engagement to build a robust council comprised of this age demographic.

"The biggest lesson we've learned is how much time it takes to build the types of connections young people need in order to participate and engage in learning spaces."

- BYC Facilitators

Launching the BYC during COVID-19 required adaptation and flexibility of the program. Having to host meetings online slowed down the process of connection and collaboration. Council facilitators found themselves dedicating additional time outreaching and ensuring the council members felt supported in reaching their goals. A considerable amount of meeting time was allotted to build friendship and community within the cohort. The frequency of meetings proved to be an initial obstacle, but the BYC requested a second optional monthly meeting. Attendance at all meetings was exceptional, the time that was invested in making the youth feel seen and heard paid off.

Inspiring Future Stewards

The opportunity for youth to influence the future design of a park is rare, but lessons from the BYC can be applied broadly. The core model behind this program is engaging youth around public space. As Clockshop executive director Julia Meltzer stated, "More young people need to be engaged in thinking about what public lands mean to them." The original design of the program included lots of time in the Bowtie Parcel introducing youth to the local ecosystem so they could share the learning with their community. While this aspect was not feasible during COVID-19, educating young adults about ecology is still a key pathway to building relationship with nature.



BYC members and facilitator Lindsey Eichenberger

The BYC's mission does not end with the Bowtie Parcel, it's part of a long-term goal to create a generation that is engaged and educated in parks and open spaces. By engaging youth in public spaces, they build relationships to the places and learn what public lands mean to them. Programs that engage young adults in these spaces are critical for building a diverse workforce of park professionals. Youth programs in parks are long term investments to create systemic change in the workforce and influence the future of state parks.

Bowtie Youth Council Mission Statement:

"The Bowtie Youth Council is a group of young individuals and residents of Los Angeles who are committed to addressing the priorities of their neighbors in relation to the accessibility of open space. We have come together to help represent the youth voice in the planning and development of Los Angeles' next state park."

Moving Forward

The Bowtie Youth Council's work culminated in a final presentation. In attendance were multiple members of State Parks leadership, including the architect that will be executing the final park design and the architecture firm leading conceptual design. This presentation summarized and interpreted responses from the survey, as well as a list of demands that represented the ideas the council found most important over the course of the project.

Additionally, the BYC requested a formal response from CSP, which they received. The [response](#) included a summary of the council's demands and confirmed CSP had received and embraced their recommendations. In the letter, CSP replied with their commitments and responses to the ideas presented by the BYC. Despite the challenges of building relationships and engaging the community through an online format, the BYC was able to influence the future of the state park.

Today, [Clockshop](#) remains committed to working with youth to cultivate the stewardship of public lands. After COVID-19 they are reassessing the best way to formalize this model moving forward. Clockshop invites anyone interested in starting a youth council to contact them directly.



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