



11th Street Bridge Park aerial view of Anacostia Image credit: OMA and Luxigon

## DESIGN

### Involving community: Co-designing together

A step beyond involvement on the ladder of community participation is co-creation, or co-design, where community members are integral in the planning, programming, and design process. Their ideas have direct influence on the design choices. Projects created with authentic community input increase trust in civic participation and development processes. Future projects may be met with less skepticism from long-term residents if promises are kept and contributors can see where their ideas and creativity went in a project.

Being clear about how community input influenced a design is important to establishing a strong relationship and ensuring all voices at the table feel heard and valued. Relationships built between community members, design teams, and clients are connections that can be activated for future projects in the area.

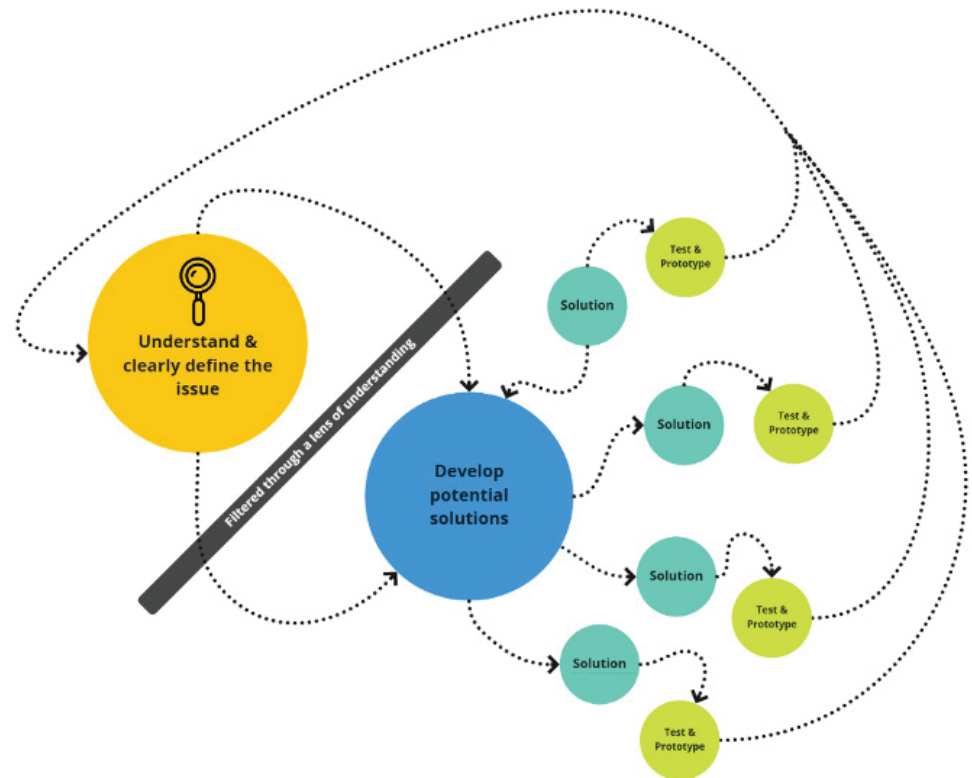
Moreover, project material selection offers an opportunity for significant positive community impact, if materials are chosen wisely. Avoid materials that have negative environmental, health, or social equity impacts—broadly as well as within the community. Focus on specifying products that are locally manufactured, highly durable, or created by manufacturers committed and certified to lead in social equity. This can help create local jobs, reduce waste in the municipality, and mitigate negative externalities that disproportionately affect communities of color.

### **i** LEARN MORE:

- » [Dick and Rick: A Visual Primer for Social Impact Design](#), Equity Collective & Center for Urban Pedagogy
- » [AIA Guides for Equitable Practice: Chapter 8](#)
- » [Take Action: AIA Materials Pledge](#)
- » [“Understanding the implications of your materials selection” AIA](#)
- » [AIA Healthier Materials Protocol](#)
- » [BlackSpace Manifesto](#)

**Consider:**

1. Co-design builds on collaboratively determined design principles or project values set out in the engagement phase or articulated earlier in the design process (see section "Involving Community: Defining Success").
2. Ideally, co-design includes three phases: understanding and clearly defining the issue; developing potential solutions; and testing concept feasibility. The diagram below describes the process by which collaborative design can lead to better initial solutioning and fuel a transparent feedback loop which tests co-created concepts, learns, and adjusts according to outcomes and reactions from all stakeholders involved.
3. Architects are responsible for the impact our work has on people and places. We also must consider the materials we select, whether they support the physical and mental health of the end users and the community and whether they are sustainably produced and by whom. [The Materials Certificate Program](#) offered through AIAU breaks down how to make the best material selection for projects, people, and the environment.



Credit: Gensler

## Translating community principles into design

Regardless of whether the process you and your client have contractually agreed to includes co-designing with the community, it is important to clearly translate the community-driven principles established early in the project into the programming and design phases. Drawing a direct connection between community input and design decisions shows that community voices are valued in the process. This goes a long way in re-establishing faith in development processes and allaying fears of displacement and gentrification.

Community principles need to be established and incorporated into design decisions, which could impact building or site layout, introduce new program elements, or influence material choices and aesthetics. Once concepts are created, it is important to check back with those engaged in creating the principles. Confirm that the information and its implications were fully understood by the design team and whether changes need to be made. For example, how well does the project authentically fit with the surrounding context and vernacular buildings through the lens of unique history and culture? Upon approval, record community decisions and priorities into the design documents.

### Consider:

1. Create design concepts that explicitly incorporate the community principles. Communicate, through diagram or key, how the principles manifest in the design.
2. Seek and receive approval on how the community principles were translated into the design before proceeding.
3. Indicate in designs (preferably as a keyed note on design development drawings) what items are a “must” from a community perspective so that principles and preferences aren’t lost in future phases.



## IN PRACTICE

Pricing and pricing changes are another reason design choices change during construction. Kia Weatherspoon of **Determined by Design** includes pricing estimates in her fixture schedules to get ahead of any pricing shifts and select an alternative fixture, if needed.

On a previous project, during construction, Kia was repeatedly told there was not enough budget for the light fixtures she specified. Her intuition told her something wasn’t right. The Determined by Design team went straight to the manufacturer, procured fixtures within the allocated budget, and provided end users a beautiful, thoughtful design within budget. Challenging the boundary of what is outside of an architect or designer’s control can yield results that support the design, community, and the engagement process.

**Firm:** **Determined by Design**

**Leadership:** Kia Weatherspoon

**Number of employees:** <20

**Base Location:** Washington, DC

**Known for:** design equity, affordable housing

*Credit: Determined by Design Project:  
Interior of Momentum at Shady Grove,  
Affordable Housing located in Rockville, MD*

### Creating welcoming renderings

Take time to consider who should be represented in a rendering and seek out entourage, activities, and context that supports a holistic, inclusive vision. Represent diverse community-driven design principles in the renderings. This seemingly small action communicates who the project seeks to include and welcome.

#### Consider:

1. Think about the “who” of the project. Do community members see themselves in the image?
2. Add details learned through the engagement phase to root the new project in the existing place.



11th Street Bridge Park shade terrace Image credit: OMA and LuxigonImage