

**Project Statement:**

King County Park's regional footprint is comprised of 200 parks, 175 miles of trail and 26,000 acres of open space. Our mission is to serve communities and enhance regional quality of life through partnerships, entrepreneurial initiatives, and sound stewardship of parks, trails and public open space. Per our business plan, we also seek to cultivate strong relationships with non-profit, corporate and community partners to enhance park amenities for King County residents while leveraging taxpayers' dollars.

Keeping these principles in mind, we set out to address the ongoing challenge of attracting more unique visitors to our parks through sustainable methods in financially challenging times. Right away, we knew that we wanted to offer an innovative amenity that utilized both salvaged and locally sourced materials while also achieving a high design aesthetic so that people would actually want to interact with it. We also knew that we wanted it to be affordable for people of all demographics, including underserved populations, to be able to experience their outdoor environment, which leads to a greater appreciation for its value and the desire to protect it; thereby reinforcing our mission and creating more awareness about who we are as a public agency.

**PART I: Research & Planning**

Challenged with limited budgets to start new projects and no budget to promote the project once it's complete, King County Parks was faced with the problem that the final product must be sustainable and replicable once additional funds are available to expand throughout our park system.

Answering the need for innovation and sustainability, we first looked to opportunities that would also help foster the next generation of park users by increasing their interest in the outdoors. From there, we narrowed our sights on opportunities that would help reinforce King County Park's identity since most park visitors don't know one park (national, state or local) from another. Plus, we needed to be able to thoroughly educate the public on the importance of King County's ability to create innovative partnerships, thereby reinforcing a reputation for being fiscally responsible while providing great amenities the public can enjoy.

Considering the high demand for close-in camping at our Tolt MacDonald Park & Campground, King County Parks had a unique opportunity to meet this demand with a compelling idea that maximized a low budget and desire for low long-term maintenance. Looking in our own backyard, we realized that 26,000 acres of nature and a global trade imbalance could have something meaningful in common. **King County Parks seized this opportunity by embarking on a campaign to design overnight camping structures re-using surplus cargo containers for our 26,000 acres of open space.** We felt strongly that the idea was enticing enough to grab the attention of the general public, community and user groups and the interest of corporate partners and professional organizations to get involved.

The next step in getting this idea off the ground was partnering with King County's GreenTools program to leverage their expertise in green building and help shape the design criteria that would become a national competition call-out for the design and architecture communities at large. The GreenTool program's added expertise helped us determine that we needed a design that would achieve high marks on King County's Sustainable Infrastructure Scorecard, be aesthetically pleasing, vandal resistant and easy to replicate with materials in the total investment range of \$10,000.

Next, we developed a comprehensive communication plan that outlined the supporting marketing tactics. Our goal was to effectively communicate the competition itself, and the overall campaign messages of innovation, green building, and branding King County Parks. We had no promotional budget so earned media interest played a key role in communicating this competition and project. We recognized the competition potential for an interesting angle to attract media interest so we made a point to strategically recruit a variety of prominent public figures to serve on our panel of design judges. A campaign timeline kept our marketing benchmarks in check and our eye on targeting publications suitable to our audience (i.e. Sunset Magazine, Seattle Magazine), Facebook fans following real-time updates, plans for a public unveiling and a recap video to promote public awareness.

**Objective 1:** King County Parks seeks to create a unique over-night recreation amenity for public use in a financially and ecologically sustainable way.

*Measurement: Total project budget of \$10,000 for construction materials.*

**Objective 2:** A competition integrating principles of conservation and sustainability with public recreation, design, aesthetics, forest stewardship, and minimal long-term maintenance.

*Measurement: King County Sustainable Infrastructure Scorecard. Final product scored 76% or a Platinum rating.*

**Objective 3:** Raising general public awareness about King County Parks; who we are as an innovative public agency and our mission to enhance regional quality of life.

*Measurement: Case study video showcasing King County Park's standards of innovation and sustainability and earned media*

## **PART II: Implementation/Execution**

As outlined in the communications plan, we started earning media interest once our press release announced the design competition and call-out for a public fan of King County Parks to join the panel of judges, that included Stone Gossard, Dow Constantine, Art Wolfe and prominent representatives from the construction and design industry. To increase social media traffic and spur third party endorsements, we asked visitors to 'fan' our Facebook page and one lucky winner would be selected to be a judge. We received media coverage at the launch of the competition, once entries were in, announcement of the winner, beginning of construction, the public unveiling in downtown Seattle and the final placement onsite at Tolt MacDonald Park. In order to keep up with all this promotional activity, we created a landing page on the Parks website that was updated frequently with news about the contest, links to press, project photos and more.

The continuous write-ups, interviews and press kept our momentum building and fed nicely into our plans for a public unveiling at "Parks World Headquarters" in front of our office building in downtown Seattle where King County employees and the general public could touch, feel and see the finished container up close. The challenge of staging a curbside public event like this included many special permitting hoops, pressure to finish the last construction details in time for the reveal and locating a 3-foot mobile staircase that would safely allow people to enter and exit the container while it was perched atop a 37-foot long trailer. The Parks team created a graphic logo and poster to promote this unveiling internally to all King County employees, externally to nearby businesses, our online blog and via our social media channels. During the public unveiling we counted more than 300 unique visitors that toured the container within a two hour window and generated impressive levels of word-of-mouth.

In tandem with the public unveiling, we also produced a recap video to serve as a promotional tool showcasing King County Parks as an innovative agency to our public users and potential partners for future projects. A series of interviews and b-roll were coordinated during the final stages of construction and onsite at the public unveil to capture the true picture of the project from start to finish.

Overall, the construction was mutually and effectively managed by the partnership between King County Parks and the GreenTools program. The combined goal of recreation and green building resulted in a functional and sustainable amenity. Part of the challenge in building the first prototype from a design rendering is avoiding mistakes that can impact the budget. With a few lessons learned that our special projects crew (electrical, carpentry, welding, painting) will apply to future models, the final product came in 10% over budget. This is a reasonable cost overrun considering our conservative preliminary estimates. The special projects crew used a team approach to building the prototype and allowed for creative solutions to any problem that would arise during the permitting and construction process, which helped to keep the project timeline on track.

## **PART III: Evaluation**

Overall, we consider the campaign to be a success with results that exceeded all of our expectations and without any promotional budget. We experienced a significant Request for Proposal response to our competition with 10 design entries from all over the world, earned press in Sunset Magazine among many other local publications and online news outlets (i.e. Evening Magazine) and had meaningful engagement with the public both in the social media realm and at the physical unveiling. A waiting list to reserve the camping container was started in response to public interest and grew to 56 names, which is more than a year's worth of booked weekends.

**Objective 1 Result:** King County Parks successfully petitioned for a donation of surplus cargo containers, utilized salvaged materials from preexisting deconstruction projects and, implemented creative solutions throughout the construction process that will result in future cost savings when replicated models are built.

**Objective 2 Result:** The attention paid to using green and salvaged materials earned the camping container an impressive platinum rating on the King County Sustainable Scorecard.

**Objective 3 Result:** The recap video of the camping container exactly captures the message that we want to get out to the public about King County Parks: we are innovative, collaborative, fiscally responsible and sustainable stewards of our parks, trails and open space.