

Phase 3. EXPLORE solutions

What ?

The Exploration phase is based on the observations and findings of the *Understanding* phase. During Exploration, the range of design options are presented and evaluated prior to decision-making.

In this phase, acceptance, co-operation, diverse points of view, and creativity are a must to obtain the best results. Professionals, citizens, community workers, merchants and elected officials are invited to suggest ideas and discuss different possible approaches.

Proposals inspired by best practices

No approach should be excluded when searching for specific solutions for each project. It is a good idea to look at local, national and international initiatives that have proven successful in similar contexts. Participatory urban planning has made remarkable progress during the last decade and many examples can serve as references.

Why ?

- To bring together all stakeholders to imagine the best solutions to the identified problems;
- To develop innovative ideas inspired by best practices;
- To develop a collective work dynamic among people who are often not used to working together.





Who ?

- Professionals working in the project area: Typically those connected to urban planning, transportation, architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. They have specialized understanding of the area and its characteristics.
- Professionals without much familiarity with the project area: They can provide a new outlook and possible design solutions.
- Citizen experts: They already have in-the-field knowledge and an informed approach to the area and process.
- Merchant group representatives: These stakeholders have a unique perspective that must be taken into account.
- School and community professionals: They are important to the social fabric of most neighbourhoods.
- Elementary and high school students: These users are particularly affected by questions of safety and can provide innovative perspectives.

How ?

- Workshops with groups of informed and active citizens
- Workshop sessions with professionals
- Workshops with elementary and high school students

Example 1

Youth workshop on the redesign of an area around a subway station

The MUEC organized a youth workshop for the project to redesign the area around the Beaubien subway station in Montréal's Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie neighbourhood. Fourteen students from La Mennais elementary school were consulted on the configuration of Beaubien Street, which many of them use to get to school.

During the exploratory walk, the children observed the built environment using their senses. They showed their reaction to places with green balloons (*I like*) and red balloons (*I don't like*). The children were frank and labelled Beaubien Street as dirty, smelling of gasoline and urine, with few trees, sidewalks that are too narrow, and motorists who don't let people cross the street. But the street could still be considered pleasant "since there are lots of activities, a lot of life and the buildings are colourful."

Using their diagnosis, the children worked on design solutions. Pretending to be urban planners, they drew improvements on photos taken during their walk, showing how they would correct the problems observed.

Their solutions were both simple and inspiring: colourful paint and climbing plants to brighten concrete structures, more trees, wider sidewalks, more visible pedestrian crosswalks, space set aside on the street for musicians, and more garbage cans. The children's ideas were presented to Borough professionals. Even if they did not fit within the project's budgetary or regulatory framework, these proposals undoubtedly enriched the adults' ideas.



Students from La Mennais school during the exploratory walk.



Students exploring solutions in a workshop.

Example 2

Design workshop for a green project in Longueuil

As part of a project to counter the urban heat island effect, residents of Habitations Bienville in Longueuil were invited to imagine a new design for the interior courtyard of their social housing buildings. More than 40 residents of all ages participated in the design workshop.

The design workshop called on the creativity and commitment of residents. They were invited to decide collectively on the location of the main activity spaces to be designed and to illustrate on a map the design elements that they wanted for each space.

After a presentation of examples of inspiring designs, residents formed small work groups to discuss the yard redesign. They made choices and indicated on a plan what spaces would be used for children's play and relaxation. They shared and illustrated their ideas on greening the yard, the buildings' walls and the parking lot.

Back as a group, the participants quickly arrived at a consensus on the designs to keep. Many residents expressed their satisfaction with having been consulted and their confidence that the professional team would create a landscape plan that would reflect their ideas.

Some examples of questions to stimulate discussion:

- What activities would you like to do outdoors?
- Where should there be shade?
- How can we have everyone take advantage of outdoor spaces?
- How should space be beautified so you can be proud of your living environment?



Residents reinvent the interior courtyard of their buildings.

"The design workshop is a time to be creative—something we rarely get to do in daily life. Opportunities to decide and debate as a group are also rare. It's important to find ways to inspire participants"

- Facilitator of the Vert chez nous project