

Lazar's Guide to Project Planning and Community Engagement

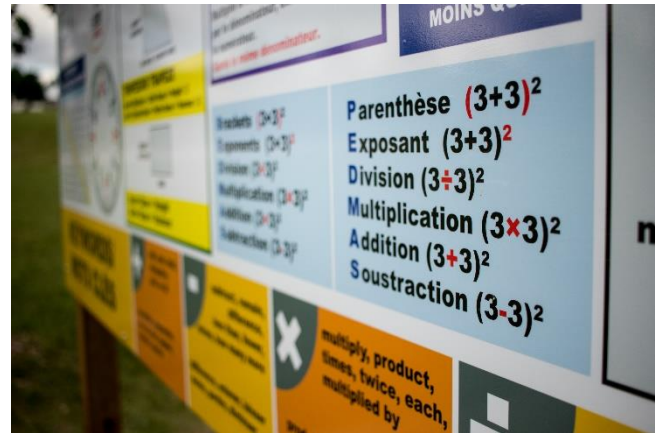
Hello, my name is Lazar Paroski!

At the age of 13, I went door-to-door in my neighbourhood to gather support to install an outdoor math wall and accessible table to help elementary children with math.

My neighbours loved the idea of a math wall and accessible table in our neighbourhood park, so I decided to apply for a grant to make it happen.



After receiving a [LoveMyHood grant](#) and installing the math wall in Morrison Park, I was asked to be a keynote speaker at the



City of Kitchener's [Good Neighbourhood Summit](#) in 2018. While I was not able to attend the summit, I was able to videotape my keynote speech and it was played at the event. My speech covered my math wall journey and included take-away tips that can be transferable towards any project. I also shared this story at the [Parks and Recreation Ontario 2019 MBA Symposium](#) in October 2019 as a keynote speaker.

The takeaway tips were well received at both speaking engagements and I am frequently asked if I can share my tips, I have created this resource for LoveMyHood to help other Kitchener residents plan their own projects.

Read through this guide for my steps and advice on how you can get started on a project and involve the community in your planning.

Lazar's Math Wall Journey

September-October 2017

- In May 2016, I wrote my Grade 6 EQAO test and was surprised to hear the results.
- I learned that our Regional elementary EQAO math results were below the Provincial standard.
- I started brainstorming what can be done to help children in math. While browsing online, I found an example of a music wall and thought "why not create a math wall?"
- I began my research, including looking into the cost of creating a math wall, and then prepared a draft site plan before I went door-to-door to share my project idea with my neighbours.

TIP: Working on something that has a purpose or you are passionate about will motivate you to make it happen.

TIP: Doing research in the early stages will help you move the project along quicker in the later stages, especially once things get busy.

October 2017

- I went door-to-door in my neighbourhood to gather support for my plan to install a

math wall, as well as an accessible table to provide a place for people to sit to do homework or relax, in Morrison Park.

- Being only 13 years old at the time, I wanted my neighbours to take my idea seriously, so I needed to be really organized! I made sure to answer the **Five W's (Who, What, When, Where, Why) and How**, do research, share draft site drawings, provide a photo of an outdoor music wall as a visual example, and prepare a budget to set me up for success when speaking with neighbours.

TIP: Talk to your neighbours before you submit a grant application, because you will be able to gather your neighbour's great suggestions and possible concerns, and demonstrate that the community has had input in the planning of your project.

TIP: When completing a grant application, make sure you answer all the questions and provide photos of the project location, budget, timelines, sample of products you tend to use and the community's support of the project, such as signatures or handwritten comments from your neighbours.

January 2018

- I was awarded a [LoveMyHood grant](#) for \$6,000 towards a math wall and accessible table at Morrison Park.

- I had meetings with a Neighbourhood Liaison from the [Neighbourhood Development Office](#) to present my project plan.
- I created a mock-up of a math wall design to take with me to engagement events.

TIP: Go to your first meeting prepared with a project timeline and a plan on future opportunities for community engagement. Being organized is very important as you only get one chance to make a first impression!

February-March 2018

- The first thing I did after receiving the grant was plan my community engagement activities!
- I held all my engagement sessions during the month of February to mid-March. For more information on my community engagement activities, check out the section on Community Engagement Highlights and Tips on page five of this guide.
- I began researching sign companies.

TIP: Community engagement should be done in the early stages of your project because your final product may change after receiving feedback from your neighbours.

TIP: If you want your project to be successful, you need to consult with your target audience before you make any final decisions. Your target audience are the experts, after all!

April 2018

- I compiled the results of my engagement with local youth.
- I provided the sign company's graphic designer with a rough drawing for the math wall.
- I provided the graphic designer with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Clear Print Guidelines so that the sign could be created with colour contrast in mind from the beginning of the design to ensure accessibility.

TIP: Make sure you are true to the engagement results and incorporate the community's feedback.

May 2018

- The location for the math wall and accessible table was finalized and a plan for installation was set.
- I requested the Mayor and my local city Councillor to attend a grand opening event for the math wall through the City of

Kitchener's website. It was a very simple and fast process that allowed me to have both the Mayor and my ward Councillor attend the ribbon cutting.

- During the month of May, I proofread many drafts of the math wall design before the
- I reached out to my Grade 8 math teacher and principal to help me with proofreading the French components of the math wall design, since it is a bilingual.

TIP: If you are unsure about something while planning your project, it is best to ask subject matter experts for help.

TIP: If you are planning a grand opening or ribbon cutting ceremony for your project and want to invite the Mayor or your local city Councillor, make sure to send your request in early.

June 2018

- After many revisions, the final version of the math wall design was completed in June and scheduled to go to print.
- I designed a flyer to promote the grand opening of the math wall and had them printed.

- I contacted the principals at both schools where I conducted engagement sessions at to ask permission for the grand opening flyers to be distributed at the end of the school year. I was given permission since the students were part of the creation of the math wall design.
- I designed graphic T-shirts for the grand opening event, and I worked with a local small business that would print a minimal number of T-shirts at a reasonable cost.
- I asked local businesses for donated items for the grand opening event, including lemonade, cookies, items for the goody bags and paint for children to paint the back of the math wall.

TIP: If you are seeking donations for your event or project, make sure you start early. Some businesses may require you to talk to a manager or provide proof of your project or event project, such as a flyer or formal letter.

July 2018

- The math wall posts, marine board and accessible table were installed.
- Flyers promoting the math wall grand opening were dropped off to neighbourhood community centres, a city

pool and posted on community boards at local grocery stores.

- ▶ Two weeks prior to the grand opening event, a group of volunteers canvassed the neighbourhood, posting flyers on community mailboxes and dropping them off door-to-door.
- ▶ Two weeks prior to the grand opening event, the volunteers helped prepare 100 goodies bags.
- ▶ Two days prior to the grand opening event, the math wall sign was secured onto the marine boards.
- ▶ Two days prior to the event, I picked up the grand opening T-shirts and provided them to the Mayor, my local Councillor and my Neighbourhood Liaison at City Hall to wear to the event.
- ▶ The day before the event, I packed up what I needed to bring to the park for the gran opening.
- ▶ The day of the event, the volunteers and I set-up prior to guests arriving.
- ▶ The math wall grand opening took place on July 27, 2018.

TIP: Some of the most valuable, transferable skills I have learned have been through sports. Through many years of competitive swimming, my coach taught me that the best way to get through sets was to break them down into manageable parts. The same idea applies to planning a project! When planning your project, try breaking your project up into chunks and work backwards from your project's deadline or grand opening event date to set your timelines and make your plan more manageable.

Lazar's Community Engagement Highlights and Tips

1. **Determine who your target audience is.**
For example, the target audience for the math wall is students in Grade one to six.
2. **Go to where your target audience is.**
This will make it easier for you to reach a relevant audience, and for them to provide feedback in larger numbers. Research the best places or events to find your target audience and go to them. For my project, I hosted engagement activities at my neighbourhood's public and catholic elementary schools, at an after-school program at the community centre and at a free family swim at a local community pool.

3. When deciding where to host your engagement activities, choose safe and accessible locations. These spaces should be accessible and safe, so that residents feel comfortable visiting. For example, I hosted engagement activities for the math wall at schools and the City of Kitchener's community centre and community pool, which are welcoming and accessible spaces.

4. Use a clear and simple way for your target audience to provide feedback. For my community engagement activities, I provided the students in Grades one to six with two red dot stickers that they could place beside the learning tool on the math wall that they thought was the most helpful to them.

5. Offer additional opportunities for residents to provide feedback. During my community engagement activities, I offered the opportunity for students in Grade one to six to draw on any information that they felt was missing from the mock-up of the math wall. This was important since the math wall was being created for children, and I wanted to make sure that what was included in the final design is what the children wanted. As a result of this open-ended question, additional learning tools were added to the final design of the math wall.



Lazar's Top 10 Takeaways

1. Research in the early stages.
2. Answer the Five "W's" (When, Where, Why, Who) and How.
3. Be prepared! You only have one chance to make a first impression.
4. Ask and listen to what the community needs are.
5. Do not be afraid to try something new.
6. Set timelines by working backwards from your project deadline and break-up tasks into manageable chunks.
7. Listen to your target audience; they are the experts and your project is for them.

8. Ask questions if you are unsure about something, and do not assume that you know.
9. Deliver what you said you would and if you cannot deliver something, explain why.
10. Earn and show respect to everyone you work with.

One quote that has been valuable during my project planning process is: “it’s not every hour you put in, it’s what you put into every hour”. So, stay focused, set yourself up for success by planning, researching, asking experts for help, and engaging with your community. Most importantly, be yourself and let your passion for your project lead you!

Thanks to the City of Kitchener Love my Hood Placemaking Challenge grant. Placemaking brings a neighbourhood to life by turning everyday spaces into destinations and gathering places. That is exactly what the Math Wall and accessible picnic table has done at Morrison Park.

Inspired by Lazar’s Math Wall? Plan your own project!

City staff are here to help and will work behind the scenes to make it easy for you to make things happen in your neighbourhood.

Have questions or need help with your application? Visit LoveMyHood.ca for some ideas and more resources, or connect with our team of Neighbourhood Liaisons to get started:

Neighbourhood Development Office

lovemyhood@kitchener.ca

519-741-2200 ext. HOOD (4663)

This information is available in accessible formats upon request. Please call 519-741-2200 ext. 4663 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.