



## THE **SANDBOX** BLOG

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### Three deep dives we took in 2014

April Greene — December 10, 2014

This was a dynamic and fast-paced year for Pilot Projects. We worked on a wide array of initiatives, traveled nationally and internationally, collaborated with scores of interesting people, and kicked around countless cool ideas. Our team completed more than ten projects in urban, workplace, retail, communications and residential design, that will impact thousands of people.

After all this, we took a year-end pause to reflect: What were our deepest explorations of 2014?

#### #1: When the workplace is a second home, it better be great

Although we've been doing green, employee-driven workplace redesigns for a long time, it was more apparent this year than ever how work has become a second home for many employees. While we at Pilot Projects do have very mixed feelings about this phenomenon, we see clearly that the most empathetic—and savvy—employers understand the best workspaces aren't what they used to be. Gone is the boring beige cubicle; inviting and dynamic spaces that reflect an organization's mission and values, where workers can feel inspired and comfortable, truly make sense today. But of course, how these aims manifest in a workplace can vary a lot from group to group.

So how can employers create a space that's inspiring, comfortable and addresses their employees' needs?

Enter participatory design.

This year, we were very pleased to work on office space redesigns for several great organizations. One of our favorites was [Fellowship for the Performing Arts](#) (FPA).

FPA, a small theater company, wanted to lose the "DMV-ness" of their Broadway office and make it a better reflection of their creative and collaborative values. Using our participatory design tool, [the Sandbox](#), we facilitated a series of meetings with the whole FPA team to gain a comprehensive understanding of their vision, business model, and workspace needs.

Once we had a design everyone agreed on (which included fun theater-related elements like bamboo "stage flooring," a theater lighting grid, and some red carpet), we worked to ensure that over 60 percent of FPA's existing office items (desks, cabinets, etc) could be reused in the new space, and that the remainder could be recycled. The outcome?



FPA Artistic Director Max McLean said: "Pilot Projects essentially doubled the size of our space. Now everyone's got all the room they need, we feel more productive, and we make a great first impression with

our space—it's a way of expressing our brand."

*Above: FPA's new office reflects their brand and creates space for growth*

## #2: Word on the street: Safety first means people first

2014 saw New York City's adoption of [Vision Zero](#), an international action plan for ending traffic deaths and injuries on our streets. Each year, approximately 4,000 New Yorkers are seriously injured and more than 250 are killed in traffic related accidents. Vision Zero will expand enforcement against dangerous moving violations (like speeding and failing to yield to pedestrians), broaden public outreach and communications, and (particularly exciting to us), introduce new street designs to improve safety.

Human-centered design has always been a cornerstone of building safe streets, and it's always been a cornerstone of our philosophy at Pilot Projects—as particularly well-illustrated in an initiative we began in 2013 that really took off this year. The [Orchard Streetscape Co-Design](#) is an infrastructure upgrade project that will make this iconic Manhattan street safer and more enjoyable for everyone who uses it: pedestrians, merchants, cyclists, building owners, and residents. The introduction of more trees and plants, bicycle parking, and better loading areas for retailers—among many other improvements—will encourage traffic calming and make navigating the corridor easier for all.



On the flipside, we were touched by traffic violence this year when our own [designer Jason Joseph](#) was struck by a car on thoroughfare Flushing Avenue in Brooklyn while riding his bike. While Jason is ultimately going to be okay, the incident cost him an expensive trip to the hospital, several days of work, and substantial pain. What's worse, the driver attempted to speed away after Jason flew over his

windshield. Luckily, a nearby witness captured the license plate number so the police were able to follow up and catch the driver, but the incident was jarring and disheartening for all of us, and underscored our need to design more people-first streets city (and world) wide.

*Above: Digital model of a future Orchard Street with more planters, bike racks, and swing-benches for street fairs*

## #3: There is a world outside NYC (aka Thinking Globally)

New York is such a dynamic and absorbing place that it's sometimes hard to remember there's a whole world outside it. But this year, although we did do a lot in the city, we also branched out quite a bit. Two of our favorite non-NYC project locations this year were Detroit and Guatemala.

In our travels to the Motor City this summer, we learned about several fascinating, bold initiatives aimed at strengthening Detroit's struggling creative workforce, and met with potential collaborators to keep developing plans for the [Detroit Innovation Factory](#) (DIF), a replicable hub for attracting enterprising immigrants to underpopulated cities while supporting innovative local manufacturing. We are very pleased to report that plans for the DIF are moving forward in partnership with [World Policy Institute](#), and we're currently in discussions with major funders to get the first pilot off the ground. You can read more about our trip and future plans with Detroit on [our blog](#).

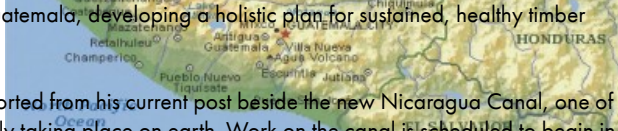
More recently, we were very excited to be commissioned by the [Ford Fund](#) to conduct a [Sandbox](#) workshop with the [Ford Resource and Engagement Center](#) (FREC) in Southwest Detroit. Our two-day workshop will explore the programming and use of the FREC space, the Center's community outreach and services, and the possibility of introducing a "maker space" there to showcase innovative work and ideas to the surrounding community. We are delighted to be partnering with Ford in all of these endeavors, and hope to help them make improvements to their already impressive work.

In another hemisphere, we've been practicing "slow growth" on the Brooklyn Bridge Forest project (BBF), a plan to maintain this beloved urban landmark with sustainably harvested tropical hardwood (you can read all about it [here](#)). This fall, we were excited to pilot the use of maniche hardwood from Guatemala at the Bronx Zoo to maintain one of its most popular walkways. The Prospect Park Zoo plans to follow suit in the reconstruction of one of its major visitor areas. More about this important development, and our plans to visit Guatemala again next year, can be found on [our blog](#).

One of our key BBF partners is Jeremy Radachowsky, Assistant Director of the Latin America and Caribbean Program at the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#). Jeremy's more than ten years on-the-ground experience and broad perspective on tropical forest conservation has been invaluable as we've worked with the local community, industry, and forest



preservation collective in Uaxactún, Guatemala, developing a holistic plan for sustained, healthy timber harvesting.



Jeremy's also taught us a lot as he's reported from his current post beside the new Nicaragua Canal, one of the largest public works projects currently taking place on earth. Work on the canal is scheduled to begin in late December, amid a storm of controversy: protesters fear the massive channel, which will divide the country in two, could create ecological havoc and displace thousands of residents and farmers without reparation; proponents argue it's a necessary feature to keep Nicaragua's economy afloat, via revenues from increased global trade. The canal involves about the most complex combination of consumption and conservation issues imaginable, and we're grateful that Jeremy is there defending local people and ecosystems and keeping us up to date from the ground.

Above: the Maya Biosphere Reserve in northern Guatemala, with the Uaxactún forest (aka Brooklyn Bridge Forest) shown in red

## This just in

Lastly, we'd like to welcome a great new member to the Pilot Projects team. **April Greene** is a writer and editor with over 14 years of experience covering the nonprofit sector, environmental issues, and culture for a variety of organizations and publications. She'll be helping us with our monthly news dispatches, project proposals, website pages, and a variety of other editorial tasks going forward. Welcome aboard, April!

With that, we'll sign off for now, wishing you a very happy holiday season, and a wonderful start to 2015! See you in the new year.

Tags: [workspace design](#), [cityspace design](#), [brooklyn bridge forest](#), [sandbox](#), [orchard street](#), [detroit innovation factory](#)

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