A vibrant photograph of a public park space. In the foreground, a man in a yellow shirt and a woman are sitting on a modern, dark brown wooden bench. A grey dog is standing next to them. In the background, another person is sitting on a similar bench, and a small brown dog is sitting on the ground. The scene is filled with large, leafy trees with green and yellow foliage. In the distance, a street with cars and buildings is visible. The overall atmosphere is bright and lively.

ASSEMBLY[®]

CIVIC DESIGN GUIDELINES

Promoting Civic Life Through
Public Space Design

Assembly is led by the Center for Active Design (CfAD)
with generous support from the John S. and James L.
Knight Foundation.

This work greatly benefits from the guidance of a diverse,
multi-disciplinary Advisory Committee.



Front Cover image Bagby Corridor; Houston, TX.

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Back Cover image Love Your Park Week; Philadelphia, PA.

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Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines

**Promoting Civic Life Through
Public Space Design**

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Letter from the Center for Active Design

The Center for Active Design (CfAD) is thrilled to release the *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines*, a first-of-its kind publication presenting evidence-based strategies to create public spaces and buildings that lay the foundation for a robust civic life—inspiring greater trust, participation, stewardship, and informed local voting. This publication builds upon an extensive body of research pointing to the crucial role of design in supporting a range of holistic health outcomes.

As the leading international non-profit organization using design to foster healthy and engaged communities, CfAD is known for translating scholarly research into practice. Our multi-disciplinary approach empowers local decision makers, providing publications, original studies, technical assistance, and digital tools that support the unique needs of diverse communities.

CfAD grew out of New York City's groundbreaking work on the *Active Design Guidelines*, which were released in 2010 to widespread acclaim. That landmark publication drove home two powerful concepts:

1. Community design has a direct and measurable impact on behavior.

For example, public health research indicates that people are more likely to walk more, play more, and eat better when they have access to the sidewalks, parks, and grocery stores that support these healthy behaviors.
2. Practitioners who shape our buildings, streets, and neighborhoods have a crucial role to play.

With their skills and influence, they can create communities that maximize health and quality of life for all residents.

These lessons have directly informed the *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines*. Assembly's exciting empirical findings suggest that a well-designed and well-maintained public realm can support a virtuous cycle, creating places where residents feel valued by their community and, in turn, take pride in and care for those spaces.

CfAD is very pleased to share this publication as a practical and inspiring tool to empower a diverse cross-section of implementers. While the primary intended audience are public sector leaders (including mayors, agency heads, planners, and policymakers), *Assembly* is meant to be useful to anyone who designs, builds, manages, studies, or advocates for great public spaces.

This important work is just beginning. We look forward to continuing collaboration with stakeholders across the country, to furthering research on the connection between design and civic life, and to celebrating the successes of local communities putting these Guidelines into practice.

JOANNA FRANK

President and CEO
Center for Active Design

Letter from Knight Foundation

John S. and James L. Knight believed that a well-informed community could best determine its own true interests and was essential to a well-functioning representative democracy. The brothers pursued those beliefs, building and running one of the largest and most commercially successful newspaper companies in America in the 20th century.

At Knight Foundation, we seek to support informed and engaged communities, and pursue our mission in a manner consistent with three core values: freedom of expression; an informed citizenry; and equitable, inclusive, and participatory communities.

In the 26 communities where we operate, we've sought to apply these values in a way that responds to what's unique about each place. That is, there is no one way to support social change. Instead, real transformation is the result of tapping into what's distinct about a place, what matters to the people living there.

Time and again, however, we have seen the power of the public realm—the spaces and places that we inhabit together—to be a force for more engaged communities or, when disinvested or neglected, to stifle engagement.

Four years ago, Knight partnered with the Center for Active Design to explore the question of whether the design of the places we inhabit every day has any effect on civic engagement. The answer was resoundingly “yes,” and so the Center moved on to the next question: how to design public spaces to encourage and invite people to engage with each other. This document encapsulates what they learned in a way others can easily use and apply.

The *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines* come at a crucial time for our democracy. Americans' trust in institutions of all kinds is in steady decline. This concerns us at Knight, because we believe that trust is an important part of a functioning democracy. It's a vexing challenge, one with no easy solution.

But how we design and program public spaces can potentially play a role. *Assembly* presents a foundational understanding, rooted in evidence, of how design can support or hinder civic life. The book offers strategies and projects that seek to inspire change in the way that “business as usual” is conducted in communities.

These Guidelines aren't for every community or every context. But for those ready to seize the power of design to improve public spaces, we hope that you find value in this innovative and important guide.

SAM GILL

Senior Adviser to the President and
VP/Communities and Impact
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation



**No Barriers
Charlotte, NC**

No Barriers reimagines public space to build stronger communities. A collaboration with Charlotte's Urban Design team resulted in several installations focused on light, sound, and play in Anita Stroud Park.



Introduction to Assembly

A robust civic life is essential to a healthy, thriving community—one where people trust each other, have confidence in local institutions, and actively work together to address local priorities. A growing body of research demonstrates that civic life is directly associated with the design and upkeep of the public realm—from streets and plazas, to parks and public buildings. Assembly is a pioneering initiative to support communities as they design and maintain public spaces that bolster civic life.

Many cities across the United States face stark contrasts in design and maintenance conditions across neighborhoods. Some areas are thriving, benefitting from easy access to beautiful, well-maintained civic assets such as parks, schools, and libraries. Meanwhile, other neighborhoods are under-resourced and overburdened by physical disorder.^{1,2}

As cities seek to bridge social divides, reinvest in the public realm, and foster civic life, it is particularly important to prioritize equitable distribution of investments so that all residents can benefit. This may mean ensuring more resources go to the neighborhoods where they are needed most. It may also mean engaging diverse groups—particularly those whose voices have been neglected in the past—in design and decision-making processes. Assembly encourages all users of the Guidelines to elevate inclusivity as they envision the future of their community.

The *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines* are an essential tool for communities seeking practical, evidence-based guidance for advancing civic life. This publication represents the culmination of a four-year collaboration to conduct original empirical research, synthesize scholarly literature, analyze projects, and identify best practices.

The Guidelines are illustrated with inspiring examples of design solutions in practice, drawing from diverse communities across the country. In-depth “Stories from the Field” provide details about how strategies can be implemented. (SEE P. 102) This publication serves as a tool to inspire local transformation, and initiate a broader national movement around design and civic life.

Defining Civic Life

Assembly benefits from the guidance of a diverse, multi-disciplinary Advisory Committee, incorporating perspectives from the fields of urban design, architecture, political science, behavioral psychology, public space management, real estate development, public policy, community organizing, technology, branding, and more.

Given the diverse viewpoints informing this work, Assembly advisors sought to establish a common vocabulary for understanding civic life. They identified **four key civic life outcomes** to help structure research, define relevant metrics, and assess the civic value of design interventions.

1. Civic trust and appreciation

Residents feel they are part of a collective civic identity. They exhibit pride in their community and trust their neighbors and their local government to do what's right.

2. Participation in public life

Residents regularly make use of enticing public spaces and attend public events that facilitate equitable access among diverse groups—sparking regular interaction among neighbors and strangers.

3. Stewardship of the public realm

Residents feel invested in and take responsibility for public spaces in their community—maintaining, programming, beautifying, and advocating for those spaces.

4. Informed local voting

Residents understand the role of local government in shaping their communities. They contact local officials, express support for issues, and vote in local elections.

Throughout this publication, these four civic life outcomes are often abbreviated as **trust**, **participation**, **stewardship**, and **local voting**.





Kebero Court
Seattle, WA

This affordable housing project designed by GGLO is located at Yesler Terrace, a 27-acre Seattle Housing Authority property, the site of the first racially-integrated public housing in the United States. A mosaic sculpture, "Harmony," interweaves multicultural symbols into a prominent piece of art.

Why Civic Life Matters

For decades, communities have been grappling with diminishing levels of trust, participation, stewardship, and local voting.

People trust one another less

The share of the population that believes “most people can be trusted” fell from approximately 50% in the 1970s to one-third in 2012.³

People are less likely to interact with someone different from them

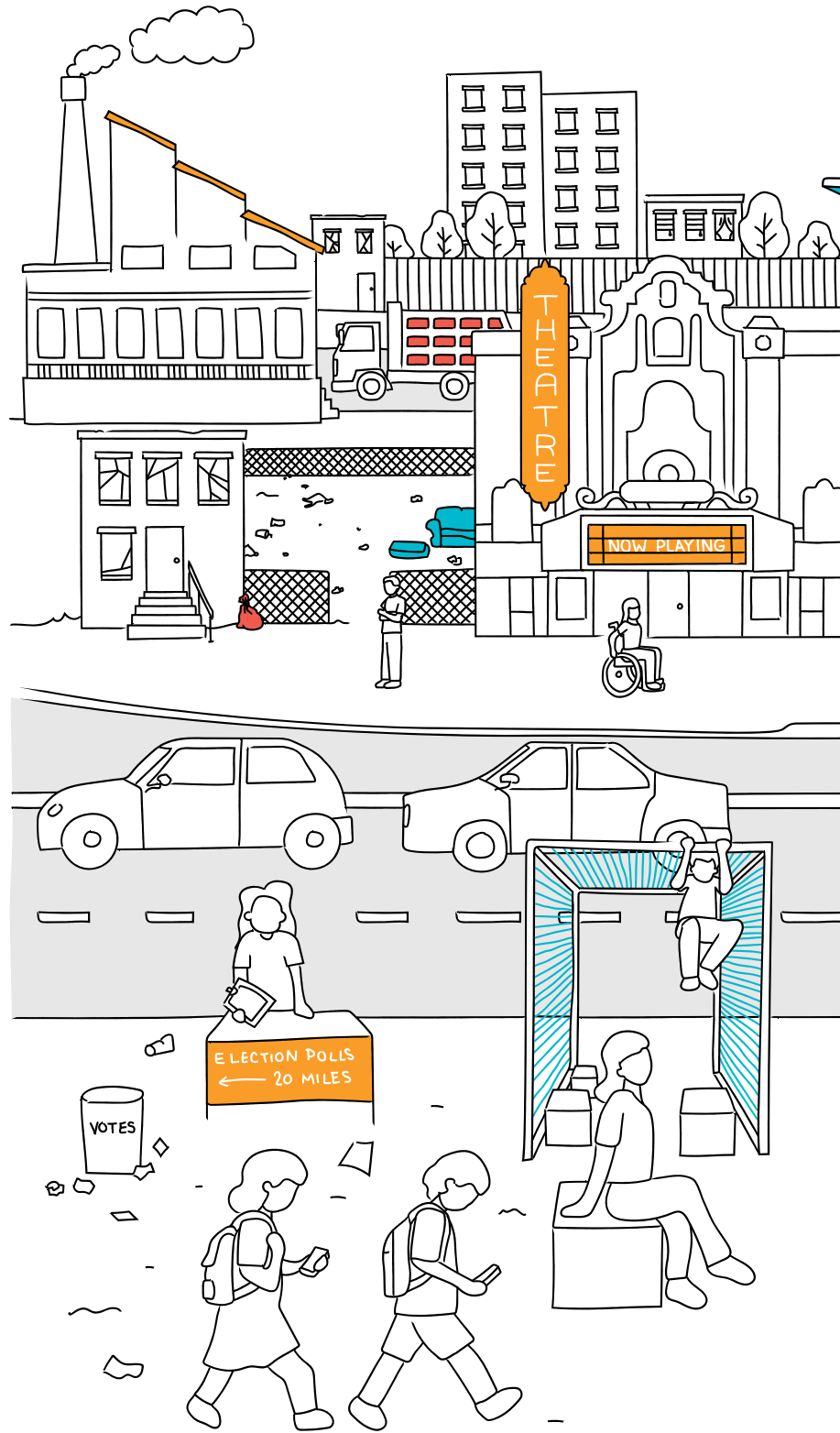
Neighborhoods are becoming more politically and economically segregated, and the number of neighborhoods with concentrated poverty has increased dramatically since the 1970s. People also feel more isolated. In fact, the number of people saying there is no one with whom they discuss important issues has tripled since 1985.⁴⁻⁶

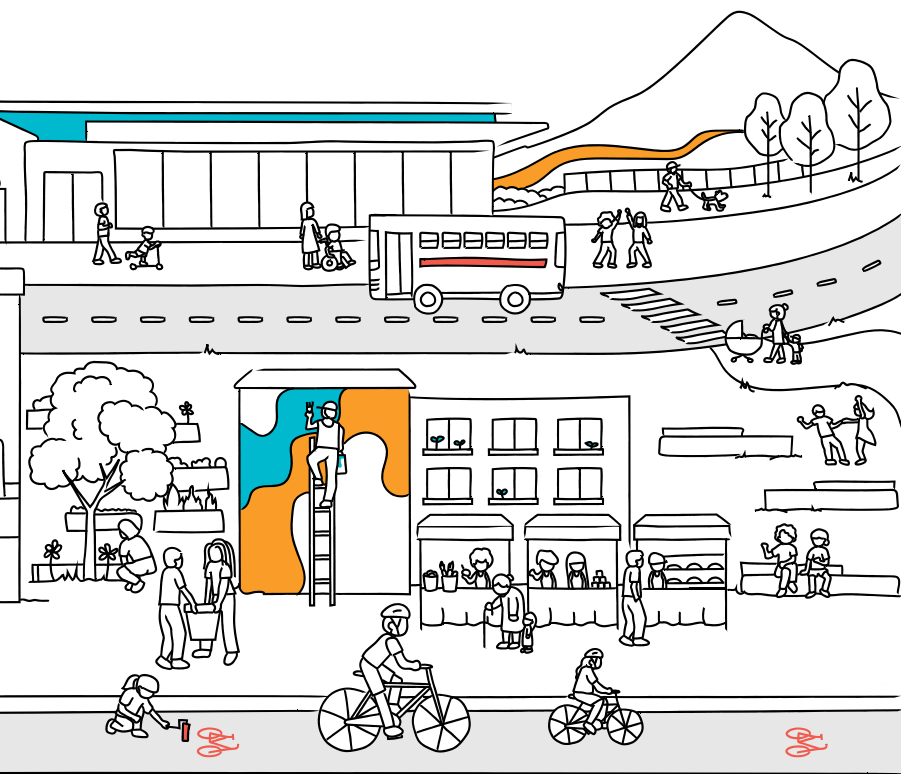
Decades of disinvestment have taken a toll

In many American communities, vacant lots and abandoned homes are associated with increased crime, reduced social connections, and poor mental health. The volatility of the housing market and a lack of affordable housing have further exacerbated these conditions.⁷

Voter turnout in local elections is remarkably low

Turnout in local elections hovers around 20% for most cities, with young voters being the least likely to turn out.⁸ Nearly three-quarters of Millennials don’t believe that politics is an effective means of changing society.⁹





Despite such negative trends, many people are successfully working to rebuild and sustain thriving, resilient neighborhoods and a strong, healthy democracy. Research indicates that communities with a more robust civic life are more likely to excel across a number of quality of life indicators:

People are healthier

Active participation in community organizations and activities is associated with lower mortality rates and better physical and mental health.¹⁰

Crime is lower

Communities where more people vote, volunteer, and join local organizations tend to have lower crime rates.¹¹

Economic outcomes are more equitable and prosperous

Communities with more engaged residents often have less inequality, higher per-capita incomes, and better long-term economic prospects.^{10,12,13}



Assembly's Research Foundation

Over a four-year period, Assembly's multi-pronged research efforts laid the groundwork for a new field of study exploring the relationship between community design and civic life.

1 Analyzed Existing Resources

Review of existing scholarly literature

Collection and analysis of over 200 peer-reviewed journal articles and publications, drawing from a range of academic disciplines.

Analysis of existing data

Observational analysis of the Soul of the Community dataset, which surveyed over 15,000 adults across 26 American cities on the subject of community attachment and community design.¹⁴ CfAD published these findings in 2016 as *Assembly Research Brief 1: Soul of the Community Analysis*.

Analysis of projects

Collection of real-world design projects that support civic life outcomes and point to practices worthy of replication.

2 Identified Gaps and Strategies

Gap analysis

Assessment of Phase 1 preliminary findings that underscore fundamental connections between qualities of place and civic life. Identification of key gaps and potential design strategies worthy of further investigation.

3 Conducted Original Research

The Assembly Civic Engagement Surveys (ACES)

Fielding of two pioneering studies in 2016 and 2017, with over 6,600 respondents exploring specific community design features that influence civic life. Surveys included innovative photo experiments exploring the causal impacts of design elements on civic perceptions.¹⁵ CfAD published results in the spring of 2017 as the *Assembly Civic Engagement Survey: Key findings and design implications*. Further details on methodology can be found in the Appendix. (SEE P. 134)

Field studies

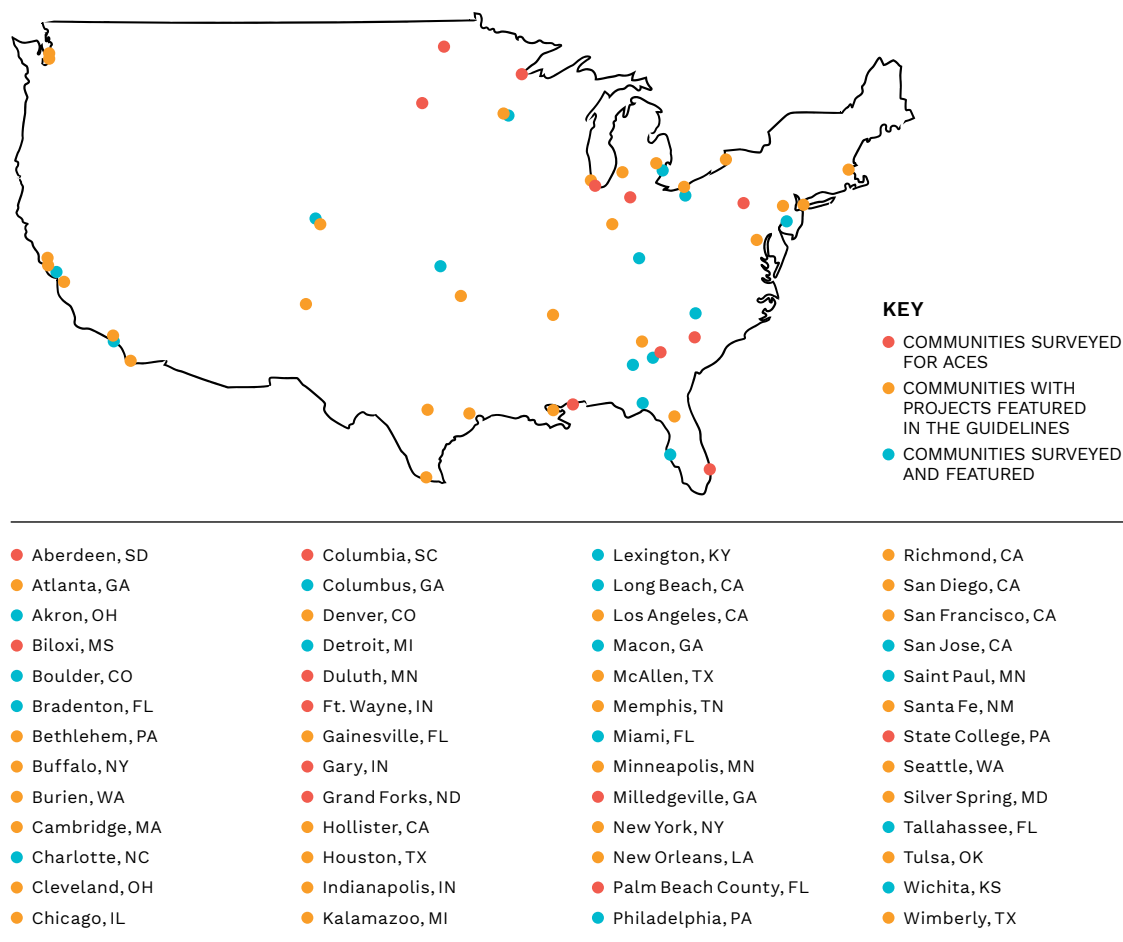
Investigation of the impacts of real-world design interventions in Bradenton, FL (SEE P. 58); Charlotte, NC (SEE P. 90); as well as San Jose, CA, New Orleans, and New York City.

4 Developed Design Guidelines

Research synthesis

Translation of extensive research findings into guidelines and strategies for the *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines*. Guidelines have varying degrees of research support. The **Evidence Key** at right shows the symbols used to convey a snapshot of the evidence base for each guideline.

ASSEMBLY: PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES



Evidence Key

Sound Evidence indicates a guideline supported by a pattern of rigorous empirical evidence from at least three existing studies published in peer-reviewed journals, or two peer-reviewed studies with supporting evidence from Assembly’s original research. The research provides sound evidence of the relationship between the guideline and elevated civic life.

Emerging Evidence indicates a guideline supported by an emerging pattern of existing or original Assembly research findings. This requires at least one high-quality existing study or consistent findings from original Assembly research. This pattern of research gives reason to believe the guideline is related to elevated civic life.

Best Practice indicates a guideline without a formal evidence base. However, theories of social and behavioral science as well as experience from professional practice suggest that the guideline is associated with elevated civic life.

Guidelines with sound evidence are likely to elevate one or more aspects of civic life (i.e. trust, participation, stewardship, and voting). Guidelines backed by emerging evidence or labeled as best practices may be just as effective at supporting civic life, yet more empirical research is needed to solidify the connection.

Applying the Guidelines in Your Community

The full impact of these Guidelines will depend on the commitment of decision-makers and implementers working to reinvigorate the civic life of their local communities. Assembly findings will continue to expand and evolve as practitioners and researchers further explore key concepts. Here are a few ideas about where to begin in your community.

Start a conversation around civic priorities

The *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines* can be used to facilitate conversations about the importance of civic life. Empirical findings can spark discussion about local needs and opportunities related to civic trust, participation, stewardship, and local voting. Practical, evidence-based design solutions can inform stakeholder discussions of public space design, maintenance, and programming needs.

Apply the Assembly checklist to your next project

The checklist synthesizes all of the guidelines and strategies found in this book. (SEE P. 144) Look for opportunities to apply select strategies from across multiple chapters. The more design strategies that are incorporated into a project, the greater the likelihood of enhancing civic life. Guidelines can be applied at any scale of design and development—from a comprehensive plan update, to a community center renovation, to smaller-scale public space improvements.

Take inspiration from other communities

In addition to the example projects found throughout the Guidelines, five “Stories from the Field” offer insight into how the design and maintenance of public spaces have benefitted specific communities across the country. (SEE P. 102) The stories focus on implementation, illuminating key partnerships, local priorities and challenges, and community engagement processes.

Set local investment priorities

These Guidelines provide an important tool to help prioritize public space investments. In some communities, this may mean using limited resources to maintain and enliven existing public spaces. In others, it may mean targeting a chronically underserved neighborhood for public space investments—actively engaging with community members to address their needs and priorities and reinforcing their sense of ownership in the project.

Test low-cost interventions

In places where resources are particularly limited, Assembly offers ways to start small. For example, open streets initiatives can be used to create temporary public spaces for programming and events. (SEE GUIDELINE 7.1) Local arts initiatives can be used to celebrate community identity and generate neighborhood pride. (SEE 4.1) Stewardship activities can bring community groups together to care for public spaces. (2.1) A new sign at a park or public building can help make people feel more welcome. (5.2) Or a tactical, temporary design prototype can provide a low-cost, collaborative way to test what works. (8.4)

Study your community

Assembly's original research suggests a range of methods to assess local civic life and understand community preferences. The guidelines can be used to inspire further research efforts, inform local decision-making, and contribute to national conversations on the relationship between design and civic life.

Inform local policies

As local civic priorities become clearer, the *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines* can inform systematic implementation efforts. They can help uncover antiquated policies that may detract from civic life, or they can aid in the adoption of new policies that suit the local context. For example, civic life can be prioritized in comprehensive plans, zoning and building codes, local design guidelines, procurement standards, and more.

Taken individually, the Assembly Guidelines are not revolutionary. In fact, they intersect with many commonly used approaches to promote public health, resiliency, economic development, and other local priorities. Yet when pursued collectively, the Guidelines offer a concrete framework for articulating and embracing a larger value system—one that celebrates civic life and reinforces trust and cooperation between residents and local institutions.



Orientation to the Guidelines

Guideline captures a recommended approach for using design to enhance civic life.

Strength of Evidence symbol indicates the current level of research support for the guideline.

Connections to Civic Life summarize key research findings that support the guideline. Relevant sources are noted like this.¹

This section may also highlight infographics, photo experiments, quotes from experts, and additional resources for further reading.

ENHANCE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

1.2 Expand Transportation Options

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Access to public transit and active transportation options like walking and biking may support civic trust.

Research suggests that social ties are weaker when public transit is difficult to access or people commute by car.¹⁹⁻¹⁷

Better transportation options may support voter participation.

Conversely, lengthy travel distances and a lack of transportation options are both associated with lower voter turnout.¹⁸⁻²⁰

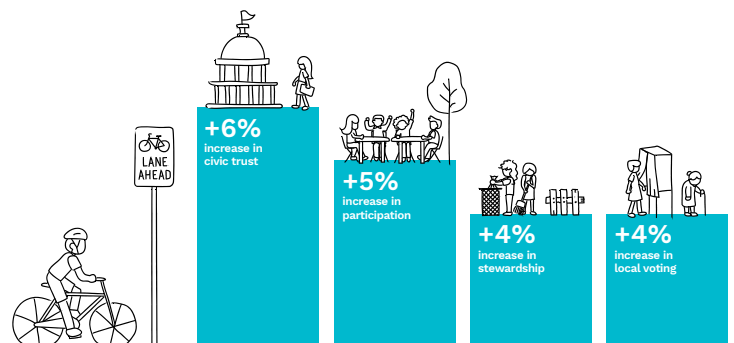
Access to public transit can be particularly important for seniors,

Transit can help seniors stay connected to their communities and remain civically engaged.^{21,22}

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Bike lanes are connected to civic life

ACES respondents who report that they have bicycle lanes in their neighborhood also score higher across all four civic life outcomes compared to people without bike lanes.²³





STRATEGIES

Develop a network of safe, continuous bicycle lanes and related bicycle infrastructure.

Fill gaps in existing bike networks and provide easy access to bike parking and/or bike share facilities.

Develop multi-use trails and greenways.

Enhance neighborhood connections to trail systems that serve transportation and recreational needs.

Enhance transit systems by increasing frequency of service, improving reliability, and making transit stops more comfortable and accessible.

Strive to make public transit an attractive, efficient, and dependable option. Ensure transit facilities are designed to maximize accessibility for all people, including children and those with limited mobility.

Adopt policies to ensure road improvements address the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

Consider policies being pursued in many communities across the country, such as Complete Streets and Vision Zero initiatives, which address the safety and transportation needs of all members of the community no matter who they are or how they travel.

Macon Connects NewTown Macon led implementation of the largest pop-up bicycle grid in the world, engaging over 1,000 local residents in the process, and resulting in permanent bicycle infrastructure investments.

Morgan Station Design by Ross Barney Architects, this elevated train station allows for smooth transitions to other modes of transportation, including pedestrian and cycling networks.

MTA Bus Time New York City buses are now equipped with real-time GPS information that transmits to electronic signs, keeping riders up-to-date about route information.

Strategies suggest actionable approaches for implementing the guideline.

All strategies are consolidated into a Checklist that can be found at the end of the book.

Images convey example projects from a range of communities, offering inspiring models for strategy implementation.

Captions provide further details on the images.

Guidelines

The Guidelines are organized into eight chapters, based on dominant themes that have emerged from Assembly's research.

Enhance Community Connections

1

Prioritize Maintenance

2

Incorporate Nature

3

Celebrate Community Identity

4

Make Public Spaces Welcoming

5

Make Public Spaces Comfortable

6

Make Space for Activity

7

Foster Local Democracy

8

**Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus
Buffalo, NY**

**A linear park designed by
nARCHITECTS and SCAPE connects
various hospitals and research
institutions, creating a vibrant, lush,
pedestrian-focused streetscape.**





Enhance Community Connections



In a well-connected community, residents have multiple transportation options—from walking and biking, to transit and driving—as they go about their daily activities. Research indicates that connectivity provides an essential foundation for civic life, ensuring that all community members can take full advantage of their local parks, libraries, polling stations, and other civic assets.

Safe, attractive, well-connected neighborhoods invite citizens of all ages, incomes, and abilities to participate in the public sphere. They create spontaneous opportunities to bump into a neighbor, discover a community event, or interact with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Well-connected communities help ensure that all people—not just those with access to automobiles—can engage in civic life.

Over the last decade, extensive research has shown that well-connected communities are associated with a range of positive quality of life outcomes, including better physical and mental wellbeing and greater economic resilience. Assembly’s synthesis of research around civic life reinforces the inherent value of walkable, bikeable, transit-accessible communities.

IN THIS SECTION

- 1.1 Put Pedestrian Needs First
- 1.2 Expand Transportation Options
- 1.3 Diversify Land Use

1.1 Put Pedestrian Needs First

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE



Walkability is connected to civic trust and participation in public life.

People living in more walkable neighborhoods tend to report a greater sense of community and stronger social networks.¹⁻⁹ In addition, people who walk frequently tend to report higher levels of civic trust (↑4%) and participation (↑6%) compared to those who say they rarely walk.¹⁰

Street design may encourage walking by making streets feel safer and more visually interesting.

Studies have found that people will typically not perceive a sidewalk on a high-speed, multi-lane road as walkable. On the other hand, a comfortable, tree-lined sidewalk along a bustling main street can entice pedestrian use.^{11,12}

Pedestrian-friendly streetscape design is associated with increased social interaction and civic trust.

A cross-sectional analysis conducted in Portland, Oregon found front porches and sidewalks were positively associated with interaction, trust, and reciprocity among neighbors.¹³

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

NACTO Urban Street Design Guide The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) published a suite of design guides that graphically detail tactics cities can use to make streets safer, more livable, and more vibrant.¹⁴





Greenbridge
King County, WA



The Porch
Philadelphia, PA



Queens Plaza
Queens, NY

STRATEGIES

Create a comprehensive pedestrian network that allows residents to walk anywhere in the community.

Fill gaps in the existing sidewalk network and require new developments to provide safe pedestrian connections to the surrounding community.

Calm traffic to reduce vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian safety.

For example, enhance crosswalk markings, extend curbs, landscape medians, narrow travel lanes, and introduce speed bumps—particularly in areas with high crash rates or heavy foot traffic.

Provide sidewalk amenities such as benches, trees, and lighting to support pedestrian comfort.

Seating allows people to stop and rest, trees beautify and provide shade, and pedestrian-scale lighting aids nighttime visibility.

Design buildings and sites to prioritize pedestrians and create visual interest along the sidewalk.

Orient main entrances and signage toward sidewalks and pedestrian paths rather than driveways, parking lots, and garages. Encourage shops to activate their frontages, for example integrating seating or sidewalk cafes. (SEE 1.3: DIVERSIFY LAND USE)

Greenbridge The Greenbridge Master Plan was developed by GGLO and partners for the King County Housing Authority. The project applied an innovative Demonstration Ordinance to prioritize pedestrians.

The Porch Located at 30th Street Station, the second busiest train station in the country, the Porch was installed by University City District and designed by Groundswell Design Group, creating parklets out of parking spaces to enhance pedestrian comfort.

Queens Plaza This project transformed a parking lot surrounded by 16 lanes of traffic and multiple subway lines into a public plaza. Designed by Marpillero Pollak Architects, the plaza incorporates new crosswalks, sidewalks, and seating areas.

1.2 Expand Transportation Options

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Access to public transit and active transportation options like walking and biking may support civic trust.

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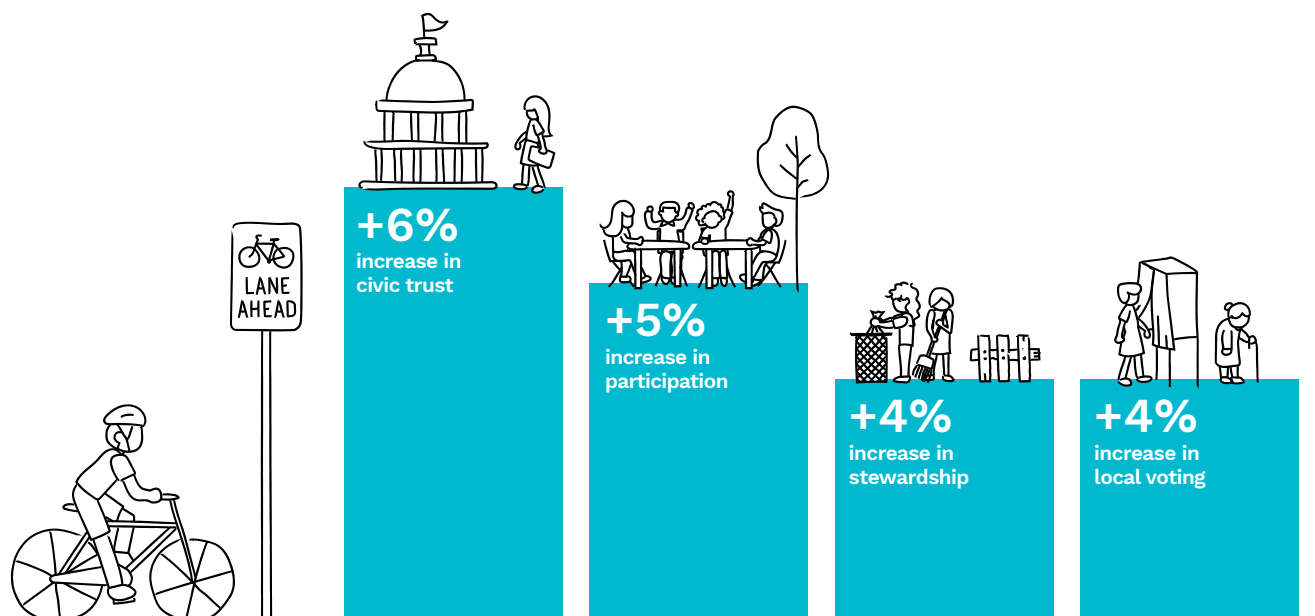
Access to public transit can be particularly important for seniors.

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

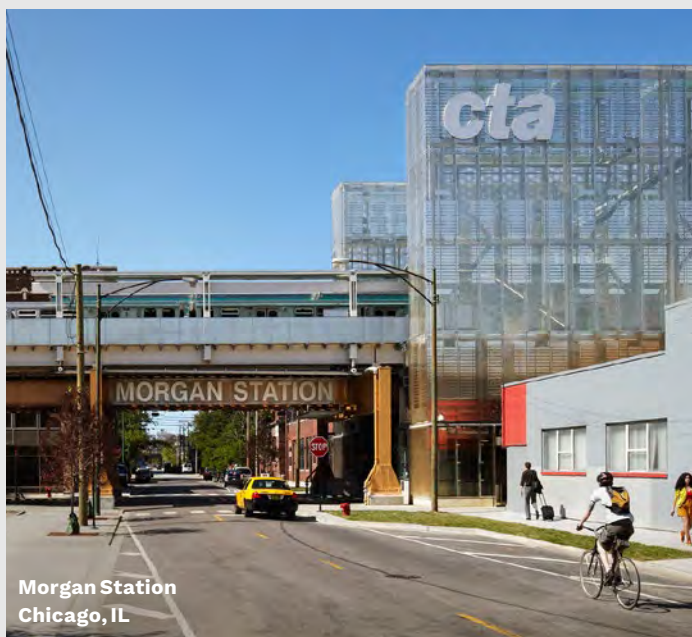
Bike lanes are connected to civic life

ACES respondents who report that they have bicycle lanes in their neighborhood also score higher across all four civic life outcomes compared to people without bike lanes.²³





Macon Connects
Macon, GA



Morgan Station
Chicago, IL



MTA Bus Time
New York, NY

STRATEGIES

Develop a network of safe, continuous bicycle lanes and related bicycle infrastructure.

Fill gaps in existing bike networks and provide easy access to bike parking and/or bike share facilities.

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Enhance neighborhood connections to trail systems that serve transportation and recreational needs.

Enhance transit systems by increasing frequency of service, improving reliability, and making transit stops more comfortable and accessible.

Strive to make public transit an attractive, efficient, and dependable option. Ensure transit facilities are designed to maximize accessibility for all people, including children and those with limited mobility.

Adopt policies to ensure road improvements address the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

Consider policies being pursued in many communities across the country, such as Complete Streets and Vision Zero initiatives, which address the safety and transportation needs of all members of the community no matter who they are or how they travel.

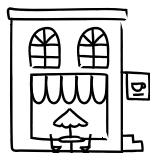
Macon Connects NewTown Macon led implementation of the largest pop-up bicycle grid in the world, engaging over 1,000 local residents in the process and resulting in permanent bicycle infrastructure investments.

Morgan Station Designed by Ross Barney Architects, this elevated train station allows for smooth transitions to other modes of transportation, including pedestrian and cycling networks.

MTA Bus Time New York City buses are now equipped with real-time GPS information that transmits to electronic signs, keeping riders up-to-date about route information.

1.3 Diversify Land Use

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE



Neighborhoods with a mix of land uses exhibit elevated civic trust.

Research indicates that people who live within walking distance of parks and retail are more likely to experience chance encounters with their neighbors, which have been shown to increase social connections and reinforce civic trust.^{6,24,25} Placing residential, commercial, and recreational spaces near each other (even in the same building or on the same parcel of land) can facilitate such encounters.

A mix of uses can support participation in public life by encouraging interaction among diverse groups.

Mixed land use encourages interaction at multiple scales—across a neighborhood, along a street, or even within a building.²¹

Mixed-use neighborhoods are generally safer than single-use commercial zones.

Researchers studying high-crime neighborhoods in Los Angeles posit that introducing more housing in commercial areas can increase stewardship, provide more “eyes on the street,” and lower crime.²⁶

STRATEGIES

Zone for a diverse mix of land uses, across neighborhoods and within individual buildings, to enhance residents’ access to community assets.

Maximize residents’ proximity to jobs, schools, parks, retail, and community centers. Such proximity also helps support opportunities for walking, biking, and transit. (SEE 1.2: EXPAND TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS)

Incentivize development to fill gaps in neighborhoods burdened with abandoned lots or high vacancy rates.

Explore incentives to encourage new, mixed-use development in targeted neighborhoods.

Encourage economically diverse housing throughout the community.

A mix of market, affordable, and subsidized housing can help stabilize neighborhoods, support demographic and economic integration, and reduce areas of concentrated poverty.



Western Avenue
Cambridge, MA



Atlanta BeltLine
Atlanta, GA



Mariposa
Denver, CO



Joe Cortright
City Observatory

Much of our sense of well-being and opportunity is determined by the neighborhoods in which we live. The composition of a neighborhood influences the social environment, peers in school, public safety, the quality of public services, and the kinds of personal and professional networks available to residents. It has become commonplace to observe that a person's life chances can be statistically explained by their zip code. As a result, the composition of neighborhoods matters both for neighborhood residents as well as for public policy.²⁷



Western Avenue The reconstruction of Western Avenue by Halvorson Design responds to the vibrant, mixed-use nature of the neighborhood—providing Complete Streets features that support pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

Atlanta Beltline The master plan led by Atlanta BeltLine Inc (ABI) re-zoned the periphery of the city to create a vibrant linear park connecting diverse neighborhoods.

Mariposa A project of the Denver Housing Authority in conjunction with numerous partners, this mixed-use, mixed-income public housing development addresses residents' desire for greater pedestrian safety, access to healthy foods, and opportunities for social interaction.



**Love Your Park Week
Philadelphia, PA**

This biannual event prioritizes the maintenance and beautification of Philly's cherished park system, through a collaborative effort led by Fairmount Park Conservancy, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, the Park Friends Network, and thousands of community volunteers.



Prioritize Maintenance

2

The maintenance conditions of a neighborhood are inherently connected to civic life.¹ The cleanliness of streets, the state of trees and greenery, and the condition of vacant lots can shape people's civic perceptions and behaviors.

Research indicates that signs of neighborhood disorder can negatively impact civic trust.^{2,3} On the other hand, well-maintained public spaces have the potential to boost trust, promote feelings of safety, and encourage community stewardship.^{4,5} Results from the Assembly Civic Engagement Survey (ACES) further reinforce these findings.

Prioritizing maintenance requires the participation of multiple stakeholders. When public agencies, local institutions, and individuals work together to care for community assets—including parks, playgrounds, sidewalks, and buildings—they demonstrate positive regard for the wider community, which can help reinforce a virtuous cycle of community pride and stewardship.

IN THIS SECTION

- 2.1 Mitigate Litter
- 2.2 Clean Up Vacant Lots
- 2.3 Maintain What Matters Most

Learning from Field Research

Perceptions of a Park Renovation

2.1 Mitigate Litter



CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

High levels of litter are associated with depleted civic trust, so keeping it at bay is essential.

Diminished levels of civic trust related to litter are particularly pronounced among low-income respondents.⁶

Litter is a very common concern and may spark further disorder.

Among ACES survey respondents, 21% reported that litter was very common in their neighborhood, and 58% said litter was at least somewhat common.⁶ Other research indicates that people are more likely to litter in places where litter is already present.⁴

Municipal services such as street cleaning play an essential role in sustaining day-to-day order and are connected to all aspects of civic life.

Compared to ACES respondents who say their streets are never cleaned, those who report high frequency of street cleaning express greater civic trust (▲15%), participation (▲10%), stewardship (▲10%), and local voting (▲6%).⁷

STRATEGIES

Upgrade trash and recycling receptacles.

Install visible, attractive receptacles at appropriate intervals in public parks and plazas and along heavily trafficked sidewalks. Ensure that litter control efforts are frequent and visible to residents.

Encourage stewardship with playful and informational clean-up campaigns.

Motivate residents, businesses, and community organizations to help keep their neighborhoods clean and litter-free. Provide signage and amenities such as dog waste bags to make clean up easy.

Increase garbage and recycling collection as well as street cleaning.

Target collection efforts in neighborhoods where litter is most problematic.

Build collaborative maintenance partnerships to address concerns around litter and neighborhood upkeep.

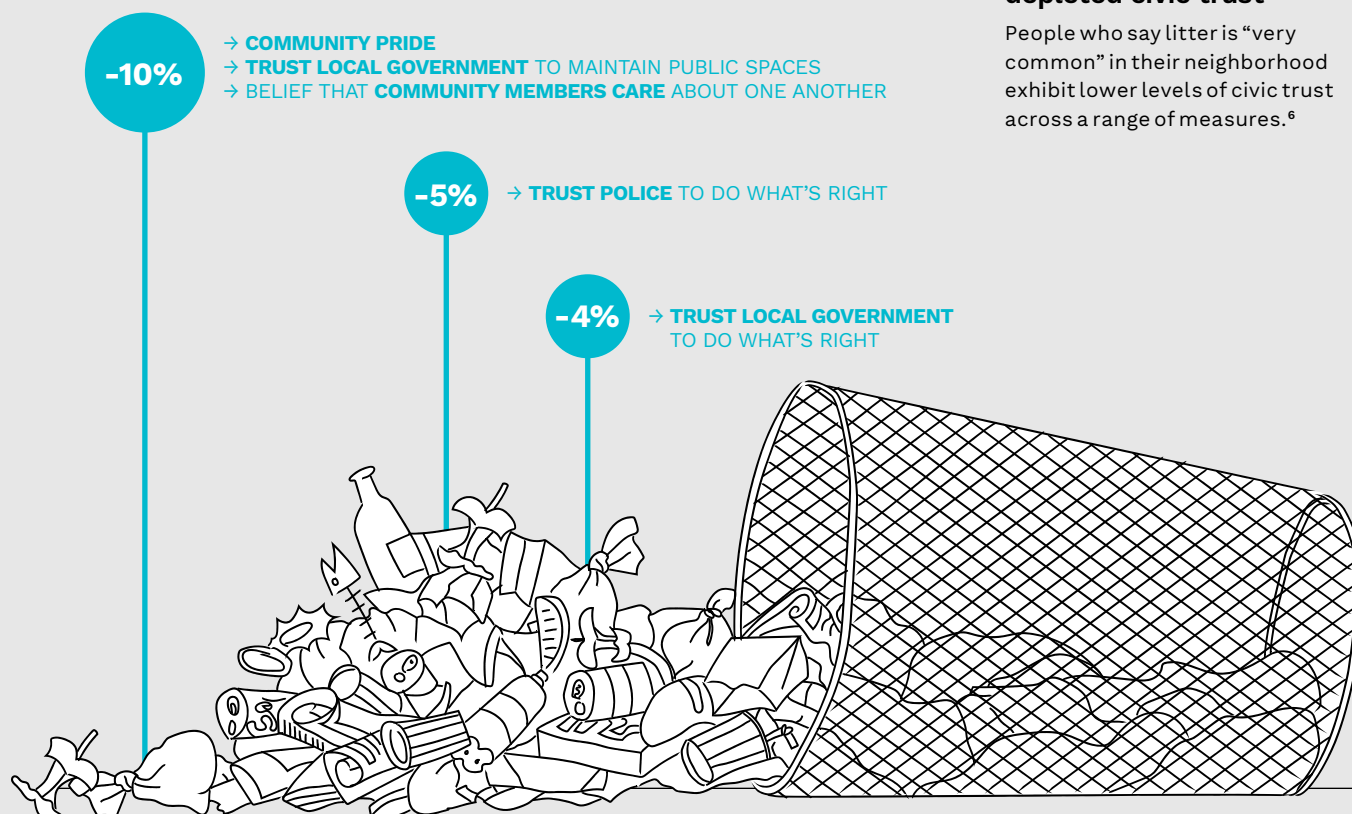
For example, work with Business Improvement Districts, park advocacy groups, and neighborhood associations to ensure sidewalks, parks, and public spaces are clean and well-maintained.



Zero Waste
New York, NY

Zero Waste Part of New York's OneNYC plan, the Zero Waste Campaign builds community awareness and enhances sanitation infrastructure with the goal of transporting zero waste to landfills by 2030.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT



Litter is associated with depleted civic trust

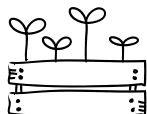
People who say litter is “very common” in their neighborhood exhibit lower levels of civic trust across a range of measures.⁶

2.2 Clean Up Vacant Lots

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Vacant lots can be seen as civic opportunities, since they can serve as important venues for neighborhood beautification and stewardship.

ACES survey respondents who say there's a community garden or public art in a vacant lot near their home report elevated measures of trust, participation, stewardship, and local voting.⁶



Vacant lot improvements are associated with enhanced perceptions of safety as well as reductions in crime.

A study in Philadelphia found that residents living near a vacant lot that was cleaned and greened with plantings reported lower levels of stress and improved perceptions of safety compared with residents near an untended vacant lot. Another study from the Lots of Green initiative in Youngstown, OH found that community-initiated vacant lot improvements can help reduce violent crime.⁸⁻¹¹

Reimagining a space like a vacant lot is key to giving people a different image of what their neighborhood can become, of what their community can be. At Urban Patch, we say our mission is to make the American inner city better, which is a huge goal. A vacant lot improvement project isn't just about beautification—it has a real impact on people's lives. ”



Justin Garrett Moore

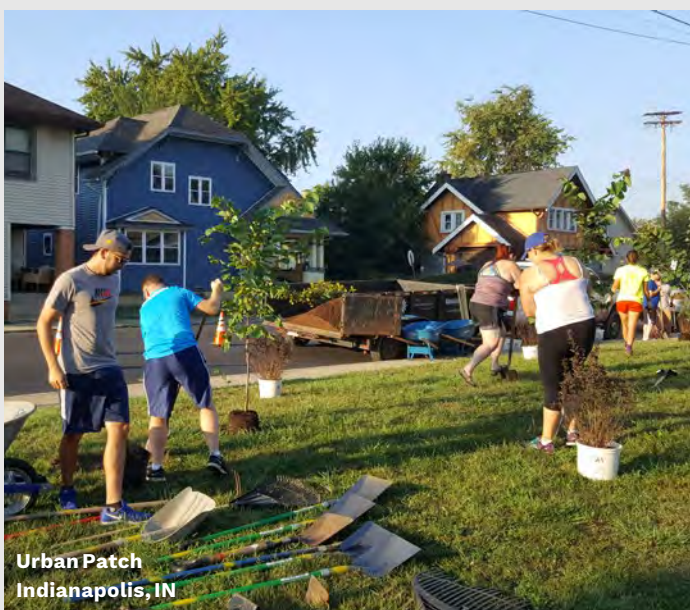
NYC Public Design Commission & Co-Founder, Urban Patch



MGB Pops!
Brooklyn, NY



596 Acres
Brooklyn, NY



Urban Patch
Indianapolis, IN

STRATEGIES

Sustain basic maintenance conditions in all publicly-owned vacant lots.

Regularly remove trash, weeds, and graffiti and ensure safe conditions prior to opening for public use.

Enforce property maintenance standards for privately-owned vacant lots.

Update ownership records for vacant lots and require landlords to meet minimum maintenance standards, pay fines, or otherwise cover the costs of upkeep.

Foster community-based stewardship (and ownership) of vacant lots.

Adopt policies and provide resources that help neighborhood groups not only maintain and beautify vacant lots, but also activate them with gardens, public art, local markets, and other activities. Broadly advertise supportive resources and design policies to protect community ownership of spaces revitalized in this way.

MGB Pops! An initiative of Brownsville Partnership/Community Solutions, this night market reclaimed a vacant lot along a lagging retail corridor to engage neighborhood residents in community revitalization and promote local entrepreneurship.

596 Acres 596 Acres facilitates the creation of community spaces in New York City by identifying publicly-owned vacant land, designing interactive advocacy tools to connect residents to untapped public lots, and providing technical assistance to neighbors as they organize campaigns to legally access and transform vacant lots into locally-stewarded places.

Urban Patch The Fall Creek neighborhood in Indianapolis lacks crucial access to healthy produce and open green space. Urban Patch and other local partners created an educational garden where neighbors work collectively to cultivate produce while strengthening neighborhood bonds.

2.3 Maintain What Matters Most

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE



The condition of amenities for children is particularly connected to civic trust.

Civic trust tends to be lower when playgrounds, sports fields, bathrooms, and other amenities catering to children and families are in poor condition.⁶ On the other hand, improved children's amenities can boost civic trust among all residents, even those who don't have kids.¹² (SEE P. 36)

Certain public space amenities are associated with higher levels of trust, regardless of their condition.⁶

The simple presence of a dog park, information board, or community garden in a local park is associated with elevated civic trust—even when these amenities are not meticulously maintained.

The maintenance of street lighting is related to civic trust and perceptions of safety.

ACES respondents who say broken lights are common in their community report feeling less safe in their neighborhood (↓20%) and park (↓8%) relative to those who say broken lights are rare.⁷

STRATEGIES

Prioritize maintenance of park amenities catering to children, young adults, and families.

Ensure playgrounds, sports fields, and public bathrooms are kept in good condition.

Identify areas where meticulous maintenance may be unnecessary.

Community gardens, dog parks, and information boards can boost civic trust even if they are rough around the edges.

Ensure lighting is well maintained and designed for pedestrian comfort.

Repair broken street lamps immediately. Use softer lights scaled to pedestrians that minimize glare or deep shadows.

Invite civic organizations and local residents to participate in maintenance efforts.

Engage multiple stakeholders in caring for parks, playgrounds, and public spaces.



**Love Your Park Week
Philadelphia, PA**

Regular upkeep of park facilities is at the core of Fairmount Park Conservancy's Love Your Park Week, a collaborative effort with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, the Park Friends Network, and thousands of community volunteers. This biannual stewardship celebration keeps playgrounds and park amenities in a state of good repair. (SEE P. 122)

LEARNING FROM FIELD RESEARCH

Perceptions of a Park Renovation¹²

Can a park renovation boost perceptions of civic trust? If so, are specific design elements behind these enhanced perceptions?

The Center for Active Design (CfAD) explored these questions using a telephone prompt experiment around a neighborhood park in a racially and economically diverse community in the South. Study findings reinforce the ability of playgrounds and other amenities for children to boost civic trust among all community members.

This relatively small neighborhood park (9.75-acres) located in an underserved neighborhood underwent a large-scale renovation during the summer of 2016. The park was closed all summer, surrounded and hidden by fencing, while the local park department added new tree plantings, a new playground, and a new soccer field. CfAD investigated how each of these individual elements would impact civic perceptions in the community.

CfAD conducted 400 phone surveys of people living within 2 miles of the park. Each survey participant was randomly assigned one of the following prompt treatments:

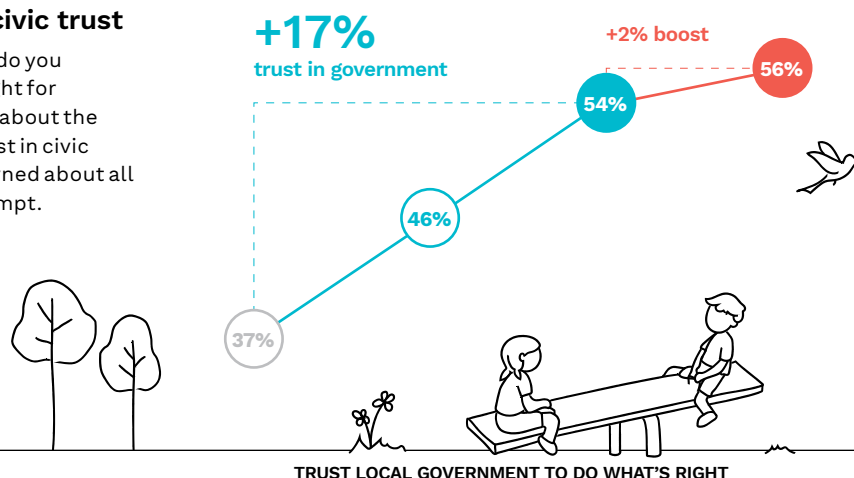
- **Control** A quarter of respondents did not receive any information about the park.
- **Tree-Planting prompt** A quarter of respondents heard about new trees that “will supply much-needed shade in the summer and will include large oak trees and beautiful flowering trees.”
- **Playground prompt** A quarter of respondents heard about a new playground that “will supply a much-needed place for kids in the community to play and will be quite large—2,700 square feet.”
- **Combined Renovation prompt** A quarter of respondents heard about multiple renovations, including “a brand new soccer field, much-needed shade created with beautiful live oaks and flowering plants, and a brand new 2,700 square foot playground for kids in the community to play.”

FIGURE 1

Park design information and civic trust

Respondents were asked, “How much do you trust local government to do what’s right for your community?” Those who learned about the playground exhibited a significant boost in civic trust—nearly as high as those who learned about all design elements via the combined prompt.

- CONTROL
- TREE-PLANTING PROMPT
- PLAYGROUND PROMPT
- COMBINED RENOVATION PROMPT



CfAD asked all respondents the same questions about their civic perceptions. Because the prompts were randomly assigned, CfAD was able to compare responses and identify the causal impacts of various design elements on civic life.

RESULTS

As shown in **Figure 1**, compared to the control group, respondents who learned about the playground and the combined renovation reported higher levels of civic trust as measured by a range of questions, including “How much do you trust local government to do what’s right for your community?” The playground prompt stands out as having a far stronger impact than the tree-planting prompt—in fact, almost as large as the combined renovation prompt that touched upon all design elements.

It is perhaps not surprising that news of a playground renovation matters to parents of young children. Interestingly, however, CfAD’s analysis revealed the playground prompt worked almost as well for respondents without children as for those with children.

Figure 2 shows that, compared to the control

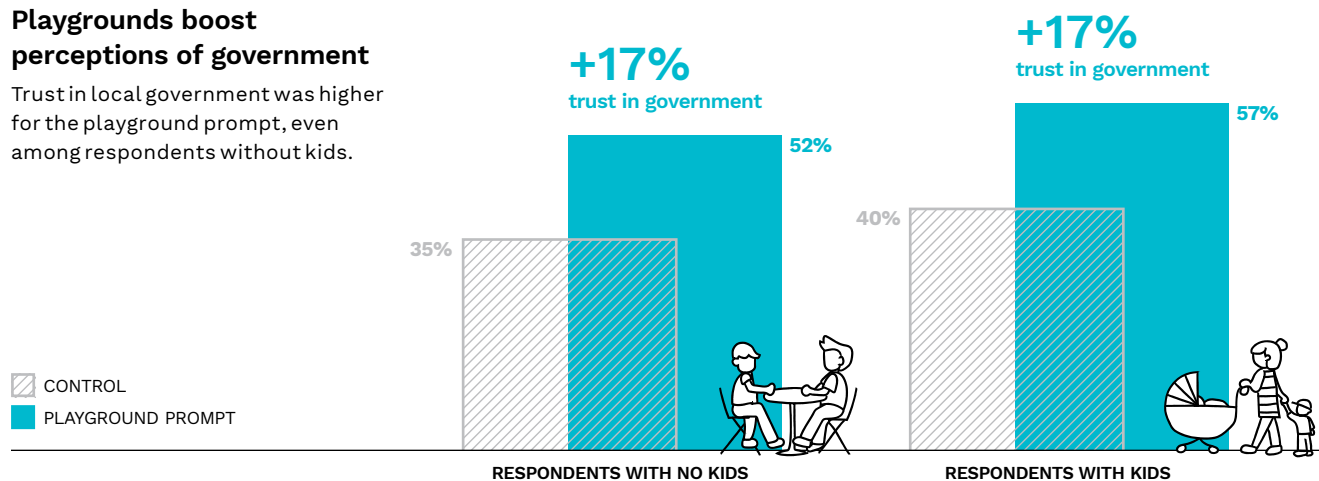
group, both parents and non-parents who learned about the playground improvement experienced a significant boost in their trust in government—17 percent for respondents without kids, as well as for those who have children living their household.

These findings are particularly important for practitioners involved in the design and maintenance of parks and other public spaces that provide amenities for children and families. While a feature such as a playground may appear to target children and families, in fact, the knowledge that the community is better serving kids can boost civic trust among all users, whether or not they have children.

FIGURE 2

Playgrounds boost perceptions of government

Trust in local government was higher for the playground prompt, even among respondents without kids.





**Workshop Garden
Queens, NY**

Located on the grounds of a public housing community, Workshop Garden creates new green space and builds social connections to facilitate participation in public life.



Incorporate Nature

3

Nature can enrich the civic life of communities. For example, urban parks have been shown to support civic trust and participation in public life by providing opportunities for intercultural and intergenerational interaction.^{1,2}

People who live in neighborhoods with access to parks and green space are more likely to report that they trust their neighbors and believe community members are willing to help each other.³

The concept of biophilia suggests that humans are innately drawn to the natural world and benefit from exposure to it. Substantial public health literature links nature to a range of health indicators, including physical activity, reduced stress, longer life expectancy, and stronger social connections.⁴⁻⁶ Nature is also associated with greater community resiliency during storms and other crises, serving as a mitigating factor in the face of climate change.⁷ (SEE 6.4: TAILOR DESIGN TO LOCAL CLIMATE)

Despite growing awareness of nature's importance, many neighborhoods lack sufficient access to parks and open spaces. Even when parks appear on a map, they may be barren of greenery or so poorly maintained as to be unusable. Investing in new parks can help incorporate nature into a community, as can smaller-scale interventions like greening sidewalks and public spaces.

IN THIS SECTION

- 3.1 Improve with Trees and Plantings
- 3.2 Encourage Community Gardening
- 3.3 Celebrate Unique Natural Assets

3.1 Improve with Trees and Plantings

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Neighborhood greenery is associated with higher levels of civic trust.

A study in Baltimore found that neighborhoods with a higher density of tree canopy also have higher levels of social capital—meaning neighbors are more close-knit and more likely to trust each other.^{3,8}

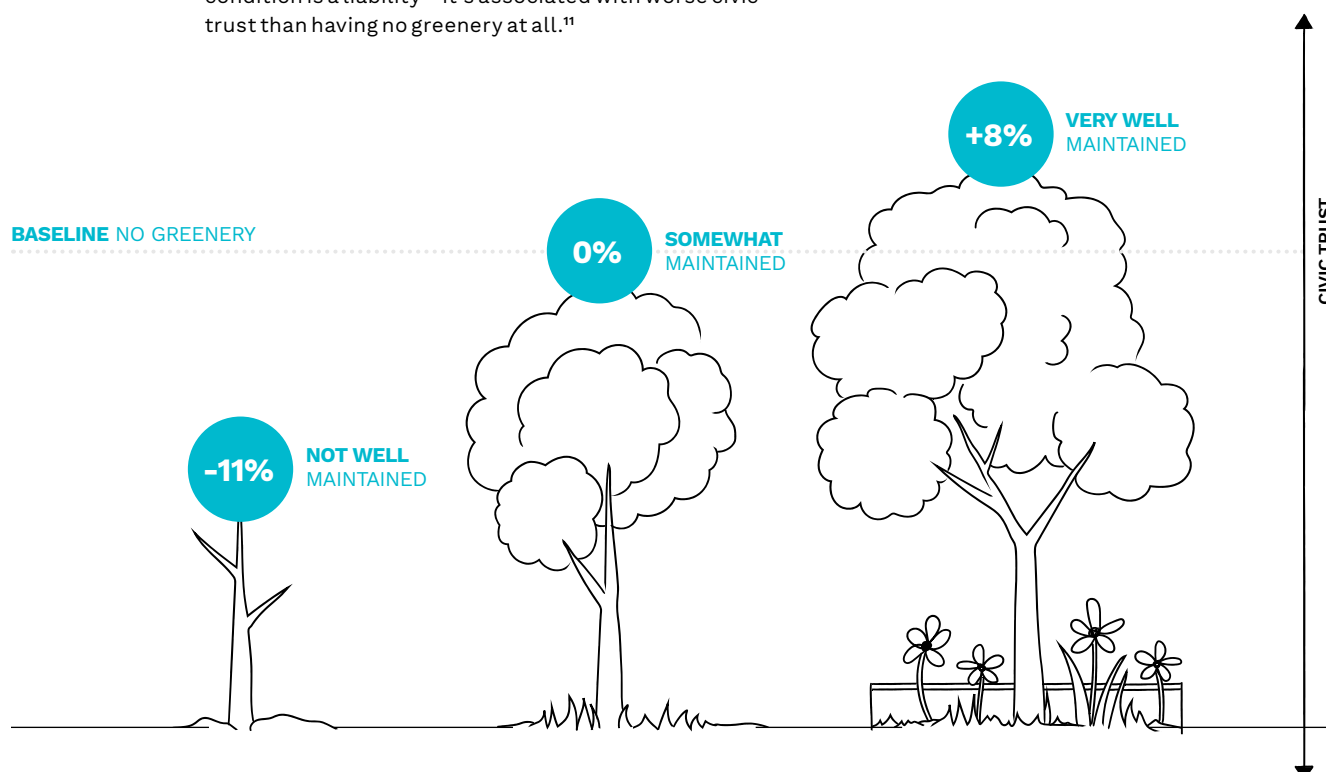
Urban green space meets a wide range of community needs, which can further benefit civic life.

Trees and greenery help beautify public spaces and make them more enticing for recreation, socializing, relaxation, and educational activities.^{9,10}

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Maintenance of public greenery is essential

People with well-maintained public greenery on their block have significantly higher levels of civic trust than those with poorly-maintained greenery. Greenery in poor condition is a liability—it's associated with worse civic trust than having no greenery at all.¹¹





Blake Hobbs Play-Za
New York, NY



Chicago Riverwalk
Chicago, IL



Bagby Corridor
Houston, TX

STRATEGIES

Increase street trees and plantings and ensure ongoing upkeep.

Encourage public, private, and community-driven efforts to maintain and enhance the urban tree canopy and improve blocks with other plantings. Given the critical relationship between maintenance and civic trust, identify partners and resources for ongoing upkeep prior to planting new trees.

Weave natural elements into parks and playgrounds.

To encourage free play and exploration, identify opportunities to introduce climate-appropriate greenery, natural play materials, and water features—particularly in neighborhoods where access to nature is limited.

Use nature to enhance public buildings.

Integrate attractive landscaping in outdoor spaces, create living walls that establish vertical gardens within buildings, and highlight views of nature.

Require inclusion of trees and green space in all new developments and major renovations.

Ensure plans provide for ongoing upkeep of greenery.

Blake Hobbs Play-Za The Blake Hobbs Play-Za in Upper Manhattan melds play spaces with a public plaza, converting an asphalt surface into a textured, landscaped parklet with an impressive tree canopy.

Chicago Riverwalk The Chicago Riverwalk offers a stunning vision of how residents can interact with their waterfront. This green space shifts in shape and form according to local programmatic needs.

Bagby Corridor Designed by Design Workshop and Walter P. Moore, Bagby Corridor revitalized a 10-block stretch of Houston's Midtown District, converting road space into a linear green park for residents to socialize and gather for events.

3.2 Encourage Community Gardening

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Community gardeners are more likely to know and trust their neighbors.

Compared to non-gardeners, they also demonstrate greater attachment to their local community.^{12,13} Gardens also serve as a space for intergenerational and intercultural engagement.¹⁴⁻¹⁶



A well-maintained community garden is related to greater stewardship in the surrounding neighborhood.

Gardens can have beneficial radiating effects, inspiring stewardship efforts throughout the community.¹¹ A study conducted in Flint, Michigan found that residential yards near community gardens were better maintained than those near vacant lots.¹⁷

Community gardeners tend to be more politically engaged.¹⁸

People who have a community garden within a 10-minute walk of their home are more likely to report elevated measures of participation in public life (↑7%) and informed local voting (↑6%).¹¹ Gardens can also provide space for political events such as voter drives and rallies.^{19,20}

STRATEGIES

Add community gardens to existing civic assets such as parks, schools, and community centers.

Clarify roles and responsibilities for all partners involved, for example through shared use agreements.

Encourage community gardens within larger residential developments.

Incorporate gardens into public spaces associated with multi-family housing developments or master-planned communities.

Provide tools and incentives to encourage community gardening on vacant lots.

Provide property ownership data, funding, materials, and technical guidance to help local residents take action as community stewards. Ensure that policies are in place to protect these shared assets from displacement. (SEE 2.2: CLEAN UP VACANT LOTS)

Design community gardens to support access for all ages and abilities.

For example, incorporate raised beds, seating, and accessible ramps and pathways.



Veggielution
San Jose, CA

Community gardens bring neighbors together to collectively cultivate plants, whether for food, beautification, or simple enjoyment. Veggielution in East San Jose uses food and farming to connect people from diverse backgrounds and build community.



Veggielution
San Jose, CA



Marymoor Park Community Garden
King County, WA



Park Garden
Indianapolis, IN



Veggielution
San Jose, CA



Greenbridge
King County, WA



Space to Grow
Chicago, IL





Aria Denver
Denver, CO

Community Gardens in Action

Veggielution Veggielution relies on a strong network of volunteers to tend and harvest crops.

Marymoor Park Community Garden Managed and maintained by volunteers, the Marymoor Park Community Garden provides a space for strengthening community ties and convening residents who share a common passion for gardening.

Aria Denver This multi-family housing development—a collaboration between Urban Ventures LLC and Perry Rose Company, and designed by OZ Architecture—incorporates gardening opportunities to foster stewardship and support civic connections.

Park Garden This garden serves the Mapleton-Fall Creek community in Indianapolis, providing a place to grow healthy food and interact with neighbors.

Mariposa Denver Urban Gardens supported the creation of community gardens at this affordable housing site, making fresh, healthy foods accessible to residents and catalyzing interaction between neighbors of diverse backgrounds.

Greenbridge Raised beds ensure residents of all ages and abilities can fully participate in community gardening.

Space to Grow This multi-sector collaborative initiative seeds community gardens in underutilized schoolyards across Chicago, transforming play spaces into dynamic community assets and sources of community pride.



Mariposa
Denver, CO



Marymoor Park Community Garden
King County, WA

3.3 Celebrate Unique Natural Assets

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE



Natural areas go hand in hand with civic trust and boost community pride.²¹

Communities across the country have long celebrated their waterfronts, parklands, trails, and other unique natural features as a source of community pride. A study of three greenways in Texas found that trails were associated with perceived quality of life, pride in community, and a sense of community identity.²²

STRATEGIES

Design public spaces to reflect and respond to local geography.

For example, incorporate native plants, feature notable vistas, or use signage to inform visitors about the ecological and historic significance of a site.

(SEE 4.3: PRESERVE AND REPURPOSE HISTORIC ASSETS)

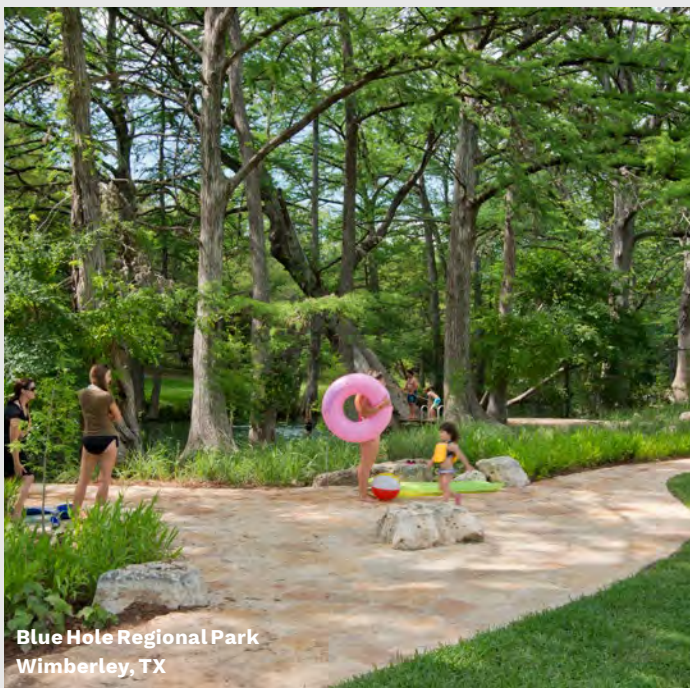
Support direct interaction with nature through free and low-cost activities.

Connect residents to the natural world through fishing piers, hiking trails, boat rental facilities, nature walks, and other activities.

Invest in public space and transportation improvements so all community members can access natural areas.

Ensure that all residents are within walking distance of a well-maintained public park. Develop multi-modal transportation access to reduce the need for parking facilities that detract from natural views. (SEE 1.2: EXPAND

TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS, 1.3: DIVERSIFY LAND USE)



Blue Hole Regional Park
Wimberley, TX



Chattahoochee River Ziplining and Rapids
Columbus, GA



Fremont Peak Park
Seattle, WA

Lisa King
Executive Director,
Summit Metro Parks
Akron, OH



One of our sites, Summit Lake, offers a beautiful natural space in the middle of the city. Yet, many surrounding neighbors are non-swimmers with fears of the water. Our job has been to engage them in creating design improvements and programs to help dispel those fears. We've installed a pop-up nature center, large stones at the edge of the lake, picnic tables, swings, a temporary shelter, along with activities like fishing and bird-watching. The project has taken off like wildfire—GED students are taking nature hikes before class, kids from the neighborhood are fishing every day. We're thrilled that more and more residents are enjoying Summit Lake.²³



Blue Hole Regional Park Designed by Design Workshop, this popular park is well-connected to the regional trail system, and offers free and low-cost activities like swimming, camping, and playgrounds featuring natural materials.

Chattahoochee River Ziplining and Rapids The country's only state-to-state zipline crosses here between Georgia and Alabama. This public attraction is managed by WhiteWater Express in collaboration with the Forest Service, creating a unique opportunity to connect with nature.

Fremont Peak Park Fremont Peak Park emphasizes a magnificent view of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains through a thoughtfully designed discovery sequence. Envisioned as a neighborhood 'walk to' park, the design of this peaceful urban oasis incorporates existing vegetation, public art, and the history of the neighborhood.



**Los Trompos
Atlanta, GA**

This installation by ESWRA + Cadena imitates a spinning top, a toy popular with children around the world. Visitors are asked to touch the art, encouraging social interaction as the art is activated. Atlanta's Midtown Alliance, High Museum of Art, and community partners joined forces to bring these colorful, interactive, life-size sculptures to the streets of Midtown Atlanta.

Celebrate Community Identity

4

Rather than imposing a particular aesthetic, the best design efforts authentically respond to a community's unique identity, context, and local priorities. Among other benefits, design that captures local identity can bolster community pride and trust in one's neighbors—both key components of civic life.

Jane Jacobs, one of the most influential thinkers and writers on cities, championed and popularized this perspective. She famously pushed back against large-scale urban renewal projects to preserve the dynamic, historic character of her Greenwich Village neighborhood. Jacobs' landmark book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* systematically analyzes the physical conditions that keep cities and neighborhoods diverse and dynamic, supporting, in her words, a “natural, continuing flow of life.”

Assembly's original research also highlights the importance of community identity. For example, one experiment in the Assembly Civic Engagement Survey (ACES) focused on a hypothetical public plaza renovation. Respondents who were randomly assigned the prompt “The design of the project will highlight the community's strong local identity” were ▲9% more likely to say the “plaza will inspire pride in this community” compared to those who did not receive the prompt. Virtually any community can benefit from bolstering its sense of identity, and it is an especially significant consideration for traditionally underserved communities.

IN THIS SECTION

- 4.1 Use Local Arts to Inspire and Engage
- 4.2 Connect Diverse Local Cultures
- 4.3 Preserve and Repurpose Historic Assets
- 4.4 Showcase Local Food

Learning from Field Research

Using Research as a Planning Tool in Bradenton, FL

4.1 Use Local Arts to Inspire and Engage

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Inviting the community to create and install public art is linked to participation among diverse groups.

Research indicates that public art can be particularly important in low-income communities, both in terms of enhancing civic life outcomes and mitigating negative impacts of neighborhood disorder.^{1,2}

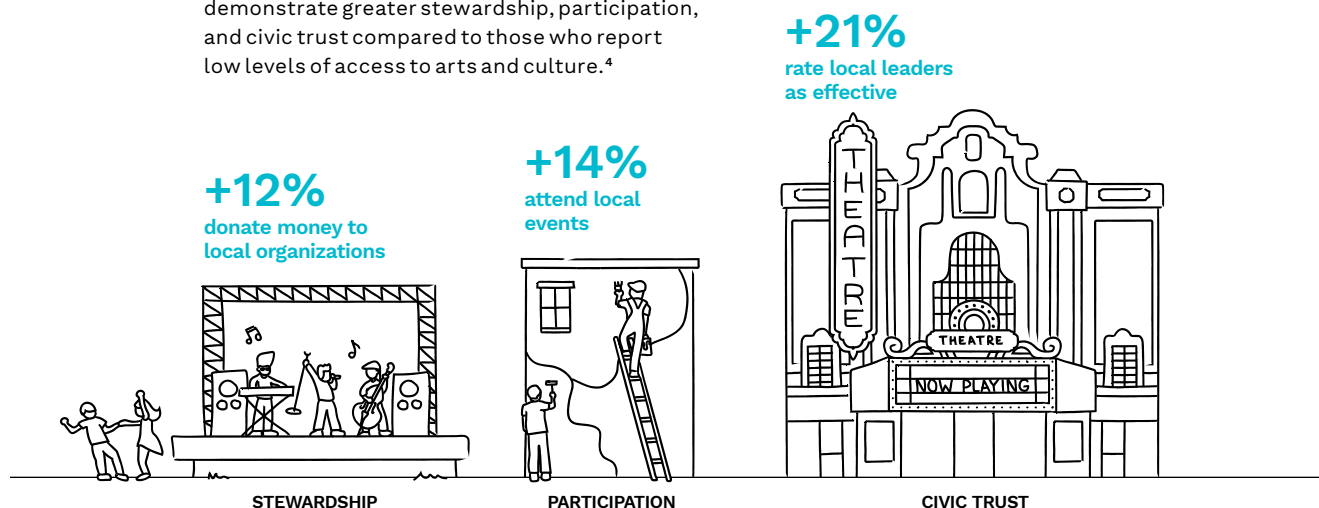
Knowing public art is locally-made and youth-driven can boost civic trust.

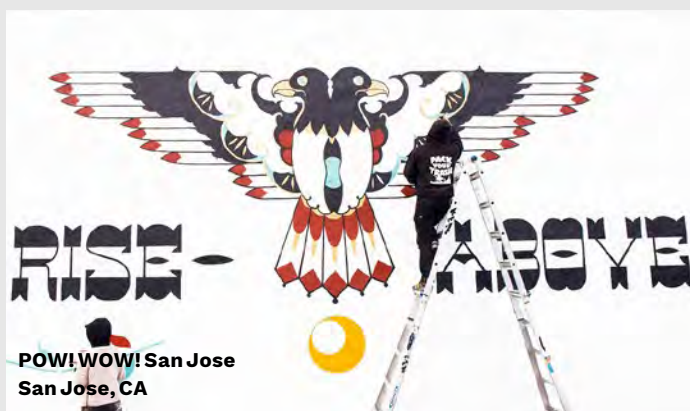
An ACES experiment showed all respondents the same image of art on a bench, and randomly assigned a prompt about the artist's identity. Those who believed the art was created by a local student (as opposed to a famous artist) were ▲9% more likely to say, "The city cares about people who live here," and ▲15% more likely to say, "The city provides opportunities for residents to participate in their community."³

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Arts and culture is connected to civic life

People who report high levels of access to arts and culture in their community also demonstrate greater stewardship, participation, and civic trust compared to those who report low levels of access to arts and culture.⁴





STRATEGIES

Increase access to arts and cultural venues and events.

Create spaces that support local artists. Facilitate exhibitions and performances that appeal to a diverse cross-section of community members.

Bring arts and cultural events into the public realm.

Make the arts visible and accessible to all. For example, arrange free performances in public spaces or hands-on art installations that encourage interaction among community members. (SEE 7.1: PROVIDE SPACE FOR PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS)

Engage local artists, schools, and community groups to create locally-driven public art.

Consider a range of locations and roles for public art. A signature piece such as a neighborhood mural can become a cherished symbol of community identity; rotating installations can help keep public spaces fresh; and regularly occurring arts events can attract crowds and boost community pride. Include signage to convey who created the art and highlight their connection to the surrounding community.

Los Trompos “Los Trompos” is a multi-year, traveling initiative to activate outdoor spaces. At Atlanta’s Woodruff Arts Center, the installation engages residents through immersive public art.

POW! WOW! San Jose Empire Seven Studio and Universal Grammar’s annual POW! WOW! event in San Jose celebrates community identity through the arts. This mural by Lauren Napolitano and Ken Davis reflects the character and culture of the city.

Pogo Park Pogo Park provides a vibrant pocket park as a space for play, stewardship, and social interaction. Local residents plan, design, build, and maintain their park. Fencing and other built elements feature residents’ personal imprints.

4.2 Connect Diverse Local Cultures

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Urban parks and plazas provide crucial venues for intercultural and intergenerational interaction.

Research indicates that parks in urban areas are particularly important for supporting inclusion and reinforcing social connections among diverse groups.^{5,6}



Multi-lingual signs can foster a sense of inclusion, encouraging greater participation in public life.

An ACES experiment found that respondents who were randomly assigned an image of a community center entrance with a welcome sign written in English and Spanish were ▲4% more likely to view the space as welcoming and inclusive compared to those who saw an image without the welcome sign. These results held regardless of the respondent's own ethnic background.²

Community events bring neighbors together—which can support civic trust, participation, and stewardship.

People who report access to an abundance of community events are more likely to say that local police are effective (▲31%); that they interact with their neighbors (▲10%); and that they work with others for change (▲11%).⁴

STRATEGIES

Ensure parks and plazas respond to local cultures.

Adapt public spaces to reflect the unique priorities and interests of the surrounding neighborhood. Depending on the community, this may mean providing space for barbeques, gardening, or a beloved sporting event.

Install multi-lingual signs at public spaces and civic buildings.

Ensure public messages reach all community members, including non-English speakers. (SEE 5.2: USE POSITIVE MESSAGING)

Celebrate diversity through local programming and events.

Create space for festivals, markets, art exhibits, performances, and other events that recognize diverse local cultures and attract all members of the community. (SEE 7.1: PROVIDE SPACE FOR PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS)

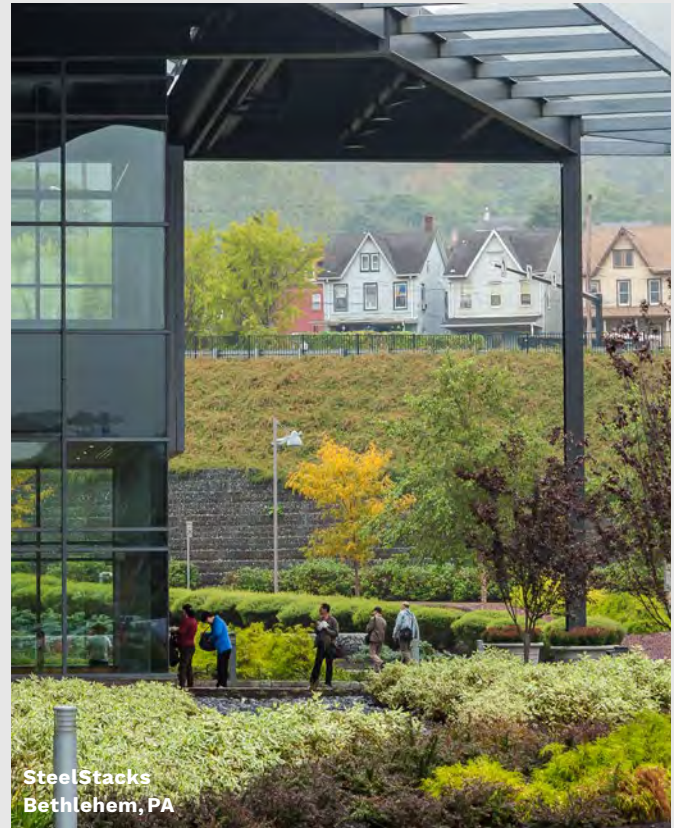
**Chicano Park
San Diego, CA**

Chicano Park points to the historic struggle of Mexican-immigrant and Mexican American residents for access to public space. Located beneath the San Diego-Coronado Bridge in Barrio Logan, the park was inaugurated in 1973 after the community quelled plans for a parking lot in the space. This park is home to the largest collection of outdoor murals in the U.S.



4.3 Preserve and Repurpose Historic Assets

Historic buildings, public spaces, and local landmarks foster a rich sense of connection to place. Projects from across the country show how historic sites have been successfully preserved and repurposed as community resources that enrich civic life.





Eastern Market
Detroit, MI



Depot Park
Gainesville, FL



Weeksville Heritage Center
Brooklyn, NY

STRATEGIES

Advance local preservation initiatives, garnering funds to revitalize historic public assets.

Local communities can often leverage state, federal, and philanthropic resources to support historic preservation efforts.

Adapt declining historic sites to serve contemporary needs.

Reimagine new public and community uses for spaces that have outlived their original function due to economic and demographic shifts. Since declining sites are often in or near under-served communities, adaptive reuse should be tailored to meet the most pressing community needs.

Look for small-scale opportunities to reinforce local history and identity.

Maps, historic signs, and neighborhood tours can tell local stories, inspire interaction, and highlight previously overlooked histories.

SteelStacks WRT Studio and SWA Group preserved the former site of Bethlehem Steel Corporation, including mill buildings, trestles, and smokestacks, to create a thriving mixed-use development.

French Quarter Unique architectural elements of the French Quarter—such as balconies, gates, lanterns, and historic signs—reflect the neighborhood's cultural and historic identity.

Eastern Market The Market's master plan, developed by WXY studio, protects the cherished character of one of the oldest food markets in the country while accommodating new activity.

Depot Park The Gainesville Community Redevelopment Agency and other local partners transformed a large industrial brownfield into a vibrant public space centered around a historic train depot.

Weeksville Heritage Center Weeksville preserves the historic settlement of one of the country's first free African American communities. A recent expansion increased programming space to attract and engage visitors.

4.4

Showcase Local Food

Food is an important part of people's cultural and regional identities. Communities across the country are putting local food front and center—creating a wellspring of opportunities to foster community pride and enhance participation in public life.

William Whyte
*The Social Life of
Small Urban Spaces*



If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food. Food attracts people who attract more people.⁷



200 Plates on Summit Lake
Akron, OH



Boulder Farmers Market
Boulder, CO



FestAfrica
Silver Spring, MD



Saint Paul Farmers Market
Saint Paul, MN

STRATEGIES

Use markets to introduce local food into public spaces and buildings.

Farmers markets can support local agriculture, while periodic events can feature local community cuisines or restaurants. Many communities celebrate their historic food halls as a destination for locals and tourists alike.

Plan community events around food.

Host public dinners and food festivals to bring diverse community members together. Use programming and events to celebrate and support community gardens. (SEE 3.2: ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY GARDENING)

Promote the value of local food through branding and marketing initiatives.

Local food vendors and food-related events can become a centerpiece of community identity and civic pride.

200 Plates on Summit Lake A highlight of the Reimagining the Civic Commons initiative in Akron, 200 Plates convened diverse community residents and national community leaders over a communal dinner. Each plate was emblazoned with a recipe from a local cook.

Boulder Farmers Market This producer-only market celebrates local agriculture and raises awareness about the benefits of sustainable agriculture on the local economy. The market offers regular programming and events around local food.

FestAfrica Hosted by Afropolitan Youth Association, FestAfrica features African cuisine, vendors, and music and dance performances by local and international artists.

Saint Paul Farmers Market This popular farmers market embraces community heritage through local produce and programming.

LEARNING FROM FIELD RESEARCH

Using Research as a Planning Tool in Bradenton, FL⁸

How can community-based research during the planning stages of a capital project elevate civic life? How can we ensure that diverse community members have the opportunity to share their opinions and help shape the design of public spaces?

Realize Bradenton and the Manatee Community Foundation explored these questions through a community-based survey process led by the Center for Active Design (CfAD). The survey garnered community input on plans to extend the Bradenton Riverwalk, an award-winning 1.5-mile park that spans the Manatee River in downtown Bradenton.

The existing Riverwalk is a vibrant recreation space, incorporating a playground, a splash pad, public art, a skate park, an amphitheater, and abundant seating. With the Riverwalk slated for an additional 0.7-mile expansion known as Riverwalk East, local partners sought CfAD's support in conducting a community survey of resident ideas and preferences to inform the project's Master Plan. A total of 884 people completed the survey, representing a diverse cross-section of residents, visitors, and business owners in Bradenton.

RESULTS

The community survey revealed important information about respondents' preferences, attitudes, and intended usage of Riverwalk East.

The survey illuminated the community's desire to showcase Bradenton's culture, history, and local identity through public art.

Sixty percent of respondents said they wanted more public art on Riverwalk East, and 30% of respondents wanted this art to highlight the history of the area.

The survey also revealed a consistent desire for passive recreation space to support connection with nature.

Sixty percent of survey respondents said one of the top priorities for Riverwalk East should be to provide more space to walk and relax near the river. Top preferences for new Riverwalk amenities also reflected a deep appreciation for natural assets: 82% wanted a scenic overlook and 78% requested shaded areas for sitting and enjoying the view.

The survey revealed a burgeoning local volunteer corps. Forty-two percent of survey respondents were at least "somewhat interested" in volunteering on the Riverwalk—much higher than average rates of volunteerism nationwide, which typically hover around 25% in most communities.⁹ That proportion jumped to an impressive 64% among respondents that lived closest to the Riverwalk East site. (SEE FIGURE 1)

Transparent dissemination of survey results brought community members together—and showed that their input had been heard. CfAD prepared a full report and Executive Summary for dissemination, and presented survey results publicly at a well-attended community meeting. Some meeting attendees were initially concerned about Riverwalk East's impact on their neighborhood—specifically around parking, crowds, and the potential loss of their neighborhood's unique identity.

FIGURE 1

Riverwalk neighbors are enthusiastic about volunteering



The presentation of survey findings helped assure residents that their concerns had been heard and were being factored into the design process.

This reassurance was further validated when architect Kimley-Horn presented the Master Plan design concepts for Riverwalk East, and meeting participants saw their key priorities and concerns reflected in the project's design. Survey results provided community members with a common language to further discuss elements of the Plan. For example, some community members were concerned that the area's unique history would be lost with the expansion of the Riverwalk and were relieved that the survey results revealed an emphasis on highlighting history and culture through public art.

According to Johnette Isham, Executive Director of Realize Bradenton, "There's a clear multiplier effect when we bring people together to help shape the city's future. This process is about building civic pride, stewardship, social connections, and wellbeing—all while sparking word-of-mouth promotion for our fantastic Riverwalk. In the end, this type of evidence-based,

collaborative planning helps us attract and retain visitors, residents, and businesses."

The Riverwalk East survey process contributed to Bradenton's civic life on a variety of fronts. Realize Bradenton and their partners spearheaded a truly community-driven planning process, fielding the survey with an impressive sample of residents, both in-person and online. Sharing survey findings via a public forum, coupled with extensive media coverage, helped reinforce a sense of trust in and excitement around the project. Finally, the survey findings surfaced critical information to inform the Master Plan—suggesting which design features would be most welcome and illuminating which groups were primed for engagement in ongoing stewardship efforts.

Susie Bowie, Executive Director of the Manatee Community Foundation, shared her thoughts in a local news interview about the meeting: "Informed and engaged communities are really critical to the success of any community and that means people who live adjacent to a project, who live near a project have the opportunity to share their voice and shape what the project will look like."¹⁰





**Governors Island
New York, NY**

Visitors to New York's Governors Island easily navigate the park's many attractions via clear and informative wayfinding. Designed by Pentagram Studio, the signage incorporates a distinct aesthetic to enhance a sense of place throughout the park.



Make Public Spaces Welcoming

5

People respond to cues in their environment, gravitating toward spaces where they feel welcome. Such cues can be overt or subtle. A prominent “Welcome” sign can make it evident that a space is open to the public, while clear sight lines into a park or community center can entice potential visitors by providing a glimpse within.

Scholarly research suggests that small changes in design and messaging can dramatically influence people’s sense of welcome—and shape civic life. Researchers have investigated how design and management practices may affect which groups feel welcome in public spaces, noting that trends toward privatization, fencing, and heightened security may disproportionately alienate certain groups—inhibiting cultural diversity and creating more homogenous public spaces.^{1,2}

Assembly’s original research reinforces such precedents, finding that design cues can play an important role in bolstering civic trust and encouraging all community member to actively participate in public life.

IN THIS SECTION

- 5.1 Create Welcoming Entrances
- 5.2 Use Positive Messaging
- 5.3 Make Navigation Intuitive

5.1 Create Welcoming Entrances

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Noticeable signs and gateways that accentuate the entrance to a park can foster participation by inviting people inside.

An ACES photo experiment developed in partnership with Miami-Dade County Parks and the University of Miami tested design options for park gateways. Respondents shown images with a prominent sign at the park entrance were significantly more likely to believe the park was inviting and used often by others.³

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

“Front Porch” improvements make buildings more welcoming

An ACES photo experiment investigated whether small-scale, low-cost improvements like seating and greenery could make public buildings more inviting.⁴

METHOD

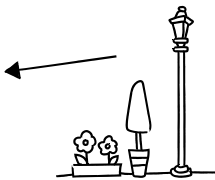
Each ACES respondent was randomly assigned just one photo and asked to imagine it was their local library and respond to questions.



PHOTO 1
LIBRARY WITHOUT
ENTRANCE IMPROVEMENTS



PHOTO 2
LIBRARY WITH SMALL-SCALE
ENTRANCE IMPROVEMENTS



I would feel
extremely welcome
attending an event
at the library



+10%
extremely welcome



STRATEGIES

Visually articulate entrances to parks, plazas, and other public spaces.

Welcoming signs, banners, and other design features can attract users, signifying that an outdoor space is open and available to the public.

Improve the “front porch” of civic buildings with modest enhancements such as seating, plantings, or lighting.

Such elements can make a public building feel more approachable and welcoming.

Make it easier to see into public spaces and buildings. Minimize walls and fencing around parks and plazas; use windows and glass façades to increase visibility into public buildings.

Clear sight lines make activities more visible and can attract passersby.



Elmhurst Public Library Designed by Marpillero Pollak Architects, the library’s welcoming entrance features a public plaza with 24/7 wifi access and a transparent façade creating a visual connection between interior and exterior spaces.

Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership The Arcus Center is designed for both private and public use. Studio Gang designed a bold façade that incorporates a public amphitheater and attractive landscaping to be enjoyed by all community members.



LAPD Metropolitan Division Facility
Los Angeles, CA



Diane L. Max Health Center
Queens, NY



New Settlement Community Center
Bronx, NY



Hollister Courthouse
Hollister, CA



Governors Island
New York, NY





SOS Children's Villages Lavezzorio Community Center
Chicago, IL



Sephardic Community Center
Brooklyn, NY

Welcoming Entrances In Action

LAPD Metropolitan Division

Facility Perkins + Will converted a 1960s-era bunker precinct into a vibrant, open community facility near downtown Los Angeles. The repurposed facility incorporates art and a community garden.

Diane L. Max Health Center

This Planned Parenthood center designed by Stephen Yablon Architecture meets stringent security requirements without sacrificing a sense of welcome.

New Settlement Community

Center This project is home to three schools and a community center serving a primarily low-income neighborhood. Dattner Architects and Edelman Sultan Knox Wood / Architects designed common spaces and activity hubs to be visible and welcoming.

Hollister Courthouse

The Superior Court of California commissioned SmithGroupJJR to design a courthouse that emphasizes a sense of democracy and public participation in justice. The site incorporates a public plaza next to an airy façade.

SOS Children's Villages Lavezzorio Community Center

This community center designed by Studio Gang provides social services to children as well as amenities serving the wider neighborhood. Public spaces and inviting building design encourage interaction among visitors.

Governors Island

The entrance to Governors Island features bold, iconic signage on a historic trellis at the dock's edge.

Sephardic Community Center

BKSK Architects renovated and expanded Brooklyn's Sephardic Community Center. The plaza at the entrance of the building invites residents to make use of the space.

5.2 Use Positive Messaging

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Positive messaging can impact perceptions among visitors to public buildings.

Research into library signage points to the value of consistent, positive, user-friendly signs in enhancing a library’s brand and supporting better experiences among patrons. One study found that patrons respond better to signage with affirmative messaging, such as “Please use cellphones outside the library,” instead of “No cellphones.”^{5,6}

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Positive park signs can increase civic trust

Signs in public spaces don’t always have to focus on rules. One ACES photo experiment was inspired by the City of Charlotte, which augmented traditional, rules-based signs in local parks (e.g. “No dogs off-leash”) with positive, “Can-do” signs intended to spark a sense of fun and whimsy. Results indicate that positive signs in parks and outdoor spaces can increase measures of civic trust.⁴

METHOD

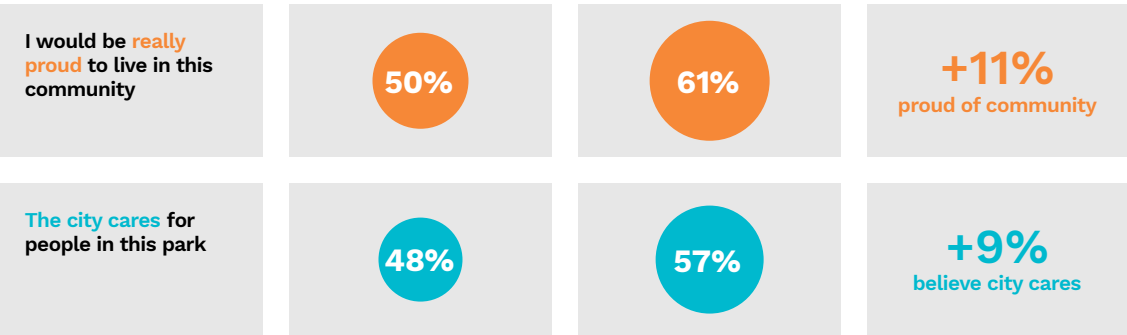
Each ACES respondent was randomly assigned just one photo and asked to imagine it was from a park near their home as they responded to questions.



PHOTO 1
TRADITIONAL PARK SIGN



PHOTO 2
POSITIVE, FUN PARK SIGN





Bradenton Riverwalk
Bradenton, FL

STRATEGIES

Install positive signs that encourage visitors to enter public spaces and make use of amenities.

Help focus attention on what's possible rather than what's off-limits. For example, emphasize the open hours of a public space: "Open every day from sunrise to sunset!" rather than "Park closes at dusk."

Make signs easy to read for everyone. Use clear language, avoid jargon, and introduce multi-lingual signs as appropriate.

Integrate images and illustrations that support universal understanding. (SEE 4.2: CONNECT DIVERSE LOCAL CULTURES)



Charlotte "Can-Do" Signage
Charlotte, NC

Bradenton Riverwalk Local artists created eye-catching illustrations reflecting the history of the City of Bradenton, installed on 14 public art panels on the Bradenton Riverwalk.

Charlotte "Can-Do" Signage The City of Charlotte experimented with playful, positive signs at 19 sites throughout the city in an effort to reframe how residents view public space. "Can-Do" signage immediately became a hit, and Charlotte continues to post engaging new signs to encourage spontaneity in public space.

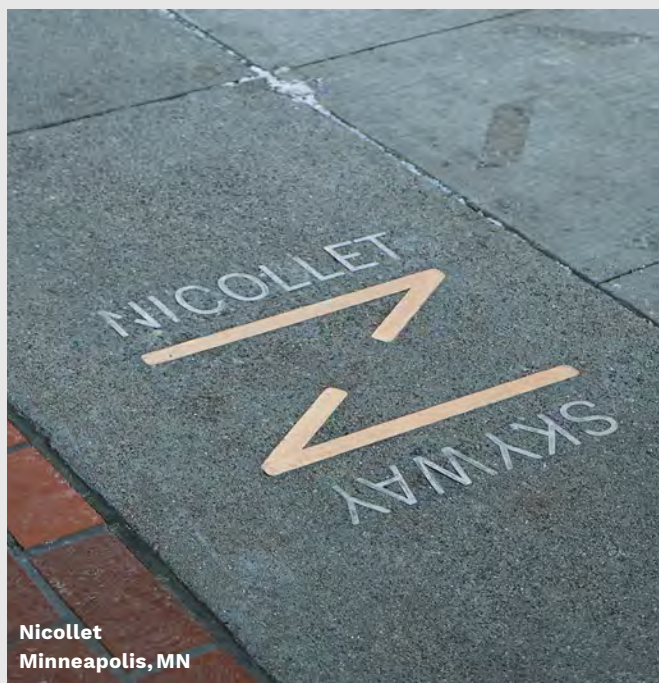
5.3

Make Navigation Intuitive

“Wayfinding” refers to the informational cues that guide people through their physical environment—such as maps, directional signage, and other symbols. Effective wayfinding helps visitors navigate public spaces and buildings, facilitating participation in public life.⁷



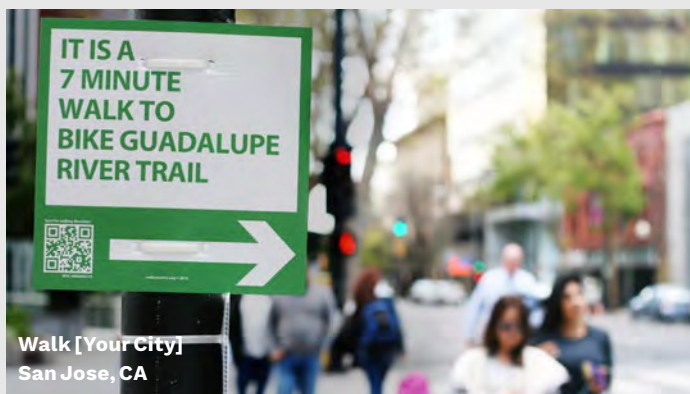
Nicollet
Minneapolis, MN



Nicollet
Minneapolis, MN



Go Ave 26
Los Angeles, CA



Walk [Your City]
San Jose, CA



Santa Fe Railyard Park
Santa Fe, NM



Go Ave 26
Los Angeles, CA

STRATEGIES

Use signs, symbols, and maps to point the way to local civic assets.

Orient wayfinding systems to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit users. For example, provide directional and distance information tailored to those who are walking.

Support intuitive navigation within public spaces and buildings by providing clear, easy-to-read signs and enticing pathways.

Such elements can encourage movement and exploration throughout the space.

Install information boards or service desks at entrances.

Such amenities can quickly orient visitors or make it easier for them to ask for help.

Nicollet James Corner Field Operations and Pentagram worked with Mpls Downtown Improvement District and the City of Minneapolis to brand Nicollet Avenue, a cultural and commercial corridor in the center city. The letter N is creatively used as a functional navigation tool.

Go Ave 26 This project supports pedestrian navigation in an area heavily dominated by highways and overpasses. LA-Más worked with community members to assess wayfinding needs and design signage that was embedded in sidewalk stickers, underpass murals, and fence weaving.

Walk [Your City] Walk [Your City] is a multi-city initiative encouraging walkability through legible, affordable signage. A digital toolkit helps residents design and print tailored signs showing the walking distance to everyday amenities and local landmarks.

Santa Fe Railyard Park Benches and curbs provide a canvas for unobtrusive directional and informational signage at Santa Fe Railyard Park. Pentagram's design team matched signage to reflect the historic character of the site.

**Rockaway Boardwalk
Queens, NY**

This rebuilt historic boardwalk provides a continuous esplanade for beach-goers to stroll and bike. Designed by WXY and built to enhanced resiliency standards, the boardwalk offers visitors nodes for concessions, shade stations, creative seating, water fountains, restrooms, and retailers.





Make Public Spaces Comfortable

6

Comfortable public spaces encourage visitors to stay longer and return more often. In the 1970s, William Whyte’s pioneering Street Life Project systematically documented the use of public spaces in New York City and identified various design features that attracted or deterred use.

Whyte’s team noted the importance of seating areas, the role trees and foliage play in sheltering people from the elements, and the tendency of crowds to congregate around amenities such as food vendors. “What attracts people most,” Whyte noted, “is other people.”¹

Emerging research from the Assembly Civic Engagement Survey (ACES) builds upon this precedent, indicating that comfortable public spaces can foster civic life. In fact, amenities such as seating, lighting, drinking fountains, and restrooms are associated with elevated levels of all four civic life outcomes.² It is important to note that the maintenance conditions of such amenities have a significant impact on people’s sense of comfort—and their perceptions related to safety and civic trust. (SEE CHAPTER 2: PRIORITIZE MAINTENANCE) Design elements that support comfort may be particularly important for inviting the participation of certain groups, including women, children, and seniors.

IN THIS SECTION

- 6.1 Provide Seating Options
- 6.2 Illuminate Public Spaces and Buildings
- 6.3 Provide Water and Restrooms
- 6.4 Tailor Design To Local Climate

6.1 Provide Seating Options



CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Seating, which makes civic assets more enticing and more accessible to people of all ages and abilities, plays a crucial role in supporting civic trust and participation in public life.

One study found that seating can help make plazas more “visitable” and draw users into the space.³ Another found that benches are particularly important for supporting the needs of older adults, facilitating mobility throughout the community and creating places to observe and connect with others.⁴ Moreover, public seating has a positive impact on the liveliness of commercial streets.⁵

Different kinds of seating can meet different civic needs—providing places of refuge, observation, or interaction—and a variety of options can promote broad use of public spaces.

People may be particularly drawn toward seating with “wide viewpoints” that provide natural vistas or an opportunity for people watching.⁶ ACES found that people perceive beer garden-style benches and moveable chairs as preferred seating for social interaction.⁷

STRATEGIES

Provide moveable seating in public spaces and buildings.

Flexible, moveable seating fosters a sense of agency, allowing visitors to tailor spaces to suit their needs.

Create nodes of shared seating such as long picnic tables, parklets, or amphitheater-style seating that places different groups in close proximity.

Negotiating use of a shared table can help facilitate introductions among residents who wouldn’t otherwise meet.

Place stationary benches throughout the community to provide predictable places to rest, wait, or socialize.

Strategically place stationary seating along major pedestrian routes, near public buildings, and at transit stops.

Design quality public seating that reflects local identity and character.

Think beyond the standard park bench to create signature seating options that capture unique local character or adapt natural elements like logs or boulders.

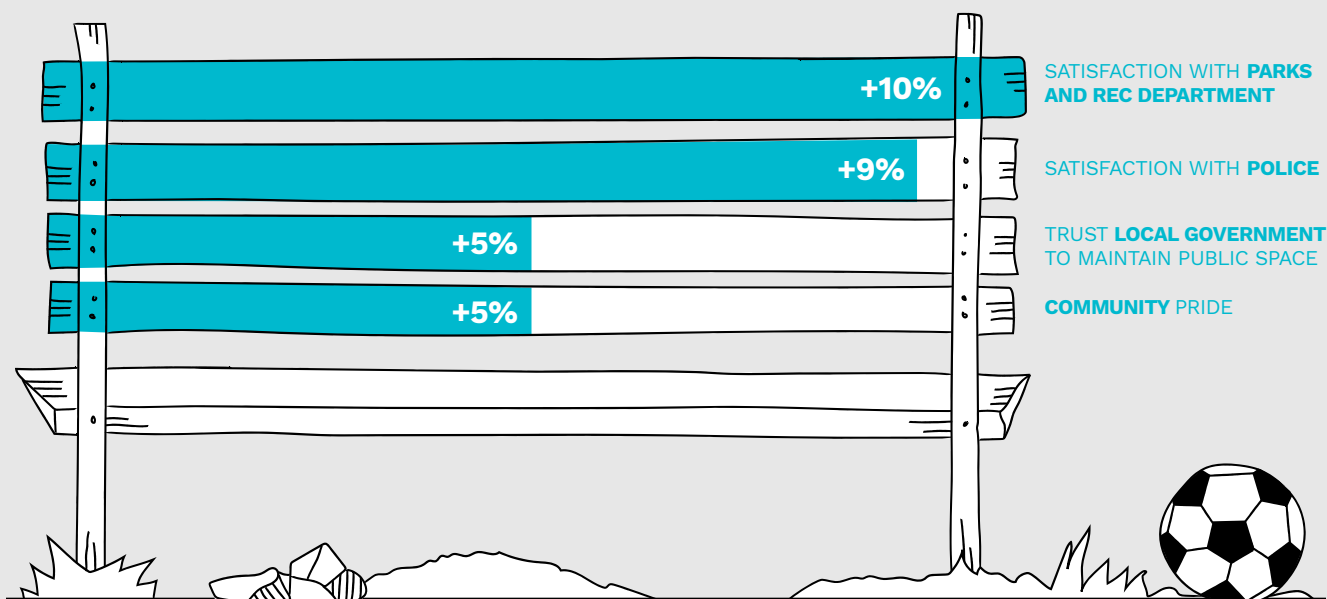


The Great Picnic This urban furniture installation, designed by Mark A. Reigelman II for The Putnam Collection at Case Western Reserve University, uses communal tables in public space to converge people and ideas.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Public seating is connected to civic trust

ACES respondents who report having adequate outdoor seating in their communities, such as benches in public plazas, tended to score significantly higher on measures of civic trust compared to those who do not have adequate seating.²





The French Quarter Parklet
New Orleans, LA



Campus Martius Park and Hart Plaza
Detroit, MI



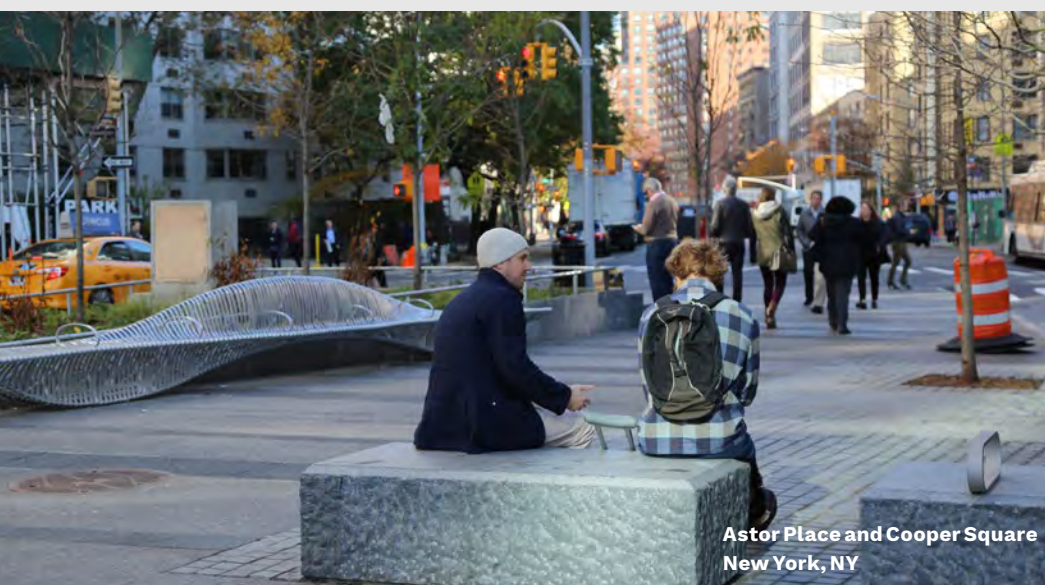
Chicago Riverwalk
Chicago, IL



Campus Martius Park and Hart Plaza
Detroit, MI



LentSpace
New York, NY



Astor Place and Cooper Square
New York, NY

Public Seating In Action

The French Quarter Parklet

A local chocolate shop in the vibrant French Quarter maintains this parklet as a fun, interactive public space.

Campus Martius Park and Hart Plaza

Project for Public Spaces worked with Detroit to convert an underused lawn into a seasonal beach, complete with sand, shade, and colorful seating areas. The space became an immediate sensation among downtown visitors.

Chicago Riverwalk The signature seating along the water's edge creates an outdoor auditorium for visitors to take in river and city views.

LentSpace The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council commissioned Interboro to reimagine a private vacant lot as a temporary public space. Innovative, moveable urban furniture functioned as both benches and wall panels to exhibit art.

Astor Place and Cooper Square

WXY Studio developed a plaza responsive to multiple community needs, incorporating enhanced lighting, landscaping, programming, and artful seating options.

6.2 Illuminate Public Spaces and Buildings

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

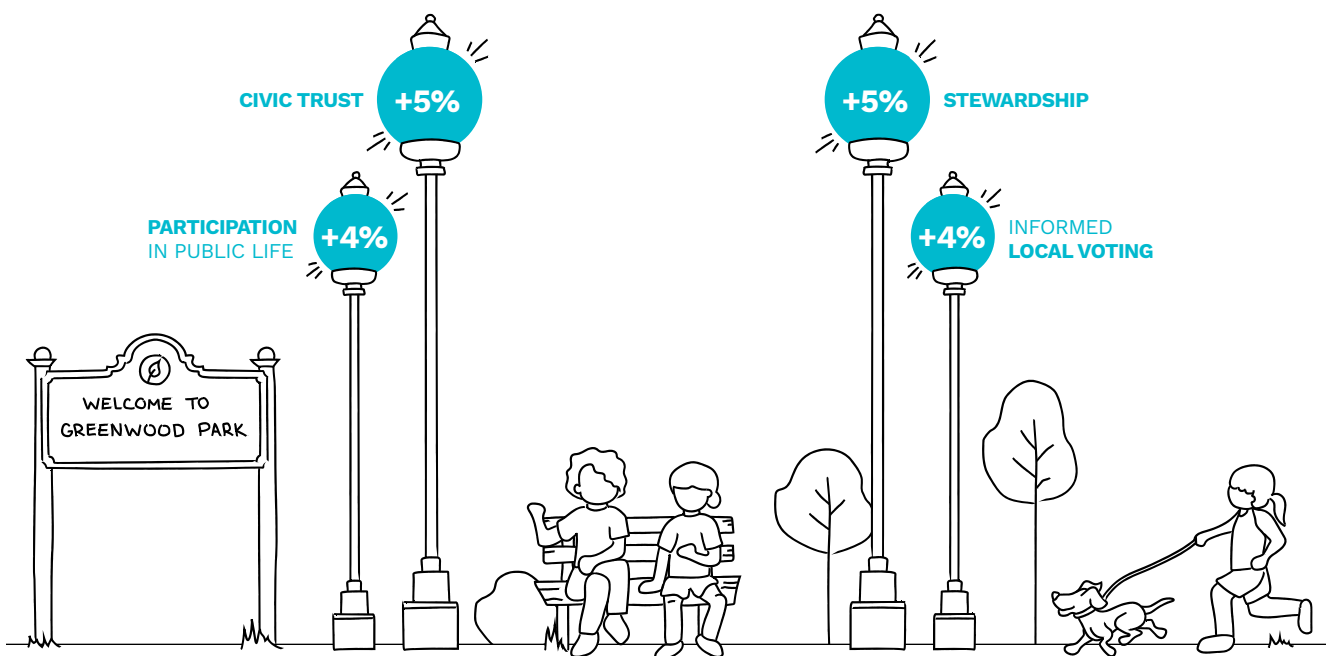
Good lighting may boost participation in public life by making streets and public spaces feel safer and more inviting.

One experiment found that bright, uniform overhead lighting can make public squares appear more inviting.⁸ Additional research indicates that well-lit streets make people feel safer and may reduce crime.^{9,10} These findings are further reinforced by ACES, which found that broken lights are associated with lower perceptions of neighborhood safety (↓20%).⁷

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Well-lit parks are connected to civic trust

ACES survey respondents who reported well-maintained lighting in their local park tended to score higher across all four civic life outcomes relative to those reporting no lighting in their local park.⁷





Historic Street Lamps
New Orleans, LA



Urban Light
Los Angeles, CA



Children's Library Discovery Center
Queens, NY

STRATEGIES

Tailor lighting to the needs of pedestrians rather than cars, positioning lamps to minimize glare and shadows.

Apply lighting design tactics that prioritize the needs of people walking along sidewalks and spending time in public spaces at night.

Install celebratory lighting to illuminate public spaces at night.

Seasonal lights or illuminated public art can provide a playful, inspiring way to enhance safety and comfort. (SEE 4.1: USE LOCAL ARTS TO INSPIRE AND ENGAGE)

Improve lighting around public buildings, particularly those that host evening events and activities such as schools, libraries, and community centers.

In addition to outdoor lighting fixtures, windows and glass façades can illuminate indoor activities and transform a building into a beacon of light for the surrounding neighborhood.

Historic Street Lamps New Orleans maintains a range of historic street lamps throughout its city districts, some dating to the 1880s. The historic lights are emblematic of the city's identity.

Urban Light The Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibited Chris Burden's 202 historic street lamps on its exterior, providing a space for night time interaction and enjoyment.

Children's Library Discovery Center A two-story addition to the Queens Central Library, this project provides an interactive and engaging learning environment geared toward children and families. Designed by 1100 Architect, the library is a community hub, with its glass façade enhancing the building's visibility and connectivity to the street.

6.3 Provide Water and Restrooms



CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE



Well-maintained drinking fountains are associated with higher levels of trust, participation, stewardship, and local voting.

ACES respondents who reported well-maintained drinking fountains in their local park tended to score higher across all four civic life outcomes relative to those with no drinking fountains—demonstrating greater civic trust (▲6%), participation (▲4%), stewardship (▲5%), and local voting (▲3%).⁷

Access to public bathrooms can boost civic trust.

ACES respondents who report access to bathrooms in their local park scored higher on measures of civic trust than respondents without such access. Specifically, they were ▲7% more likely to express community pride and ▲6% more likely to express satisfaction with their mayor.⁷

STRATEGIES

Make drinking water readily available in public spaces—especially parks, playgrounds, and other places that encourage physical activity.

Prominent, well-maintained drinking fountains and bottle-fill stations encourage tap water consumption as a healthy, free, and environmentally sustainable beverage option. They also provide opportunity for chance encounters and spontaneous conversation.

Provide well-maintained bathrooms in parks and public spaces.

Well-maintained public bathrooms address a fundamental human need and are particularly important for supporting children and families' use of public spaces. Universal, gender-neutral bathrooms can help make public spaces more inclusive for all community members.¹¹



**Discovery at Cascades Park
Tallahassee, FL**

A family-oriented playscape has interactive water features and activities for all ages, while a range of amenities dot the park's landscape, including water fountains, restrooms, and other facilities to support park visitors.

6.4

Tailor Design to Local Climate

Cities face a range of weather-related challenges—from extreme heat, to heavy rainfall, to blankets of snow. While academic research is still limited, inspiring examples show that keeping civic assets open throughout the year is a great way to maximize participation in public life.



SplashJAM
Lexington, KY



First Night Akron
Akron, OH



First Night Akron
Akron, OH



Burien Town Square
Burien, WA



PlaNYC Rockaway Park
Queens, NY



PlaNYC Rockaway Park
Queens, NY

STRATEGIES

Mitigate heat through tree planting, shade structures, and water features such as fountains and splash pads.

These elements can reduce the urban heat island effect and support participation in public life throughout the summer.

In colder climates, design public spaces to reduce wind exposure, maximize sunlight, and accommodate winter activities.

Provide strategically placed shelters and outdoor heating lamps to help people warm up. Make space for wintertime activities such as ice skating. Ensure snow removal for public spaces and sidewalks prioritizes pedestrians, not just vehicles.

Design public spaces for resilience.

Consider how public space design can connect civic life and resiliency goals. For example, plantings and permeable surfaces can capture storm water, create a buffer against severe weather and sea level rise, and reinforce civic life by increasing access to nature. (SEE CHAPTER 3: INCORPORATE NATURE) Welcoming, comfortable, dynamic public spaces provide a crucial resource for fostering social connections and cultivating civic trust—qualities that are essential for helping neighborhoods persevere in times of crisis.

SplashJAM Gehl co-designed SplashJAM, a temporary splash pad installation, to explore how diverse communities could convene and play together in public space.

First Night Akron A New Year's Eve celebration, First Night embraces the cold conditions of winter, offering winter-themed activities, as well as music, theater, dance, and visual arts.

Burien Town Square At this plaza designed by GGLO, a summertime splash pad creates space for families to enjoy the weather.

PlaNYC Rockaway Park This reconstructed boardwalk design by WXY integrates new resiliency enhancements to protect NYC's coastline from future climate events. A unique design aesthetic connects visitors to sea marshes and dunes.



The Uni Project
New York, NY

The Uni Project brings a safe, playful learning environment to a range of public spaces. Custom-designed installations invite people of all ages to play, draw, and read — demonstrating that fun and learning can occur anywhere.



Make Space for Activity



In his influential 1986 publication, *Life Between Buildings*, Danish architect Jan Gehl called for intimate, friendly public spaces that support a wide range of activities. The key to sparking activity, Gehl noted, is to plan from the perspective of the pedestrian.

This means moving away from staid, large-scale, monolithic designs and instead creating visually nuanced public spaces that stimulate the senses and support diverse, overlapping uses. “People are attracted to other people,” Gehl noted. “New activities begin in the vicinity of events that are already in progress.”¹

Assembly research builds on this foundation, pointing to a clear relationship between community activity and civic life. All neighborhoods need spaces for both planned events and spontaneous interactions with neighbors and strangers. These opportunities to gather with other community members have been shown to foster a sense of shared norms and values and to boost civic trust.²⁻⁴

IN THIS SECTION

7.1 Provide Space for Programming and Events

7.2 Support Informal Interactions

7.3 Reclaim Underutilized Infrastructure

Learning from Field Research

Activating a Government Plaza in Charlotte

7.1 Provide Space for Programming and Events

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Programming and events can attract more people to a public space, supporting participation in public life and enhancing civic trust.

A 2017 Assembly field experiment at a government plaza in Charlotte, NC found that when the space was activated with food trucks and programming, respondents were ▲23% more likely to report that “the local government understands my concerns.”⁵ (SEE P. 90)

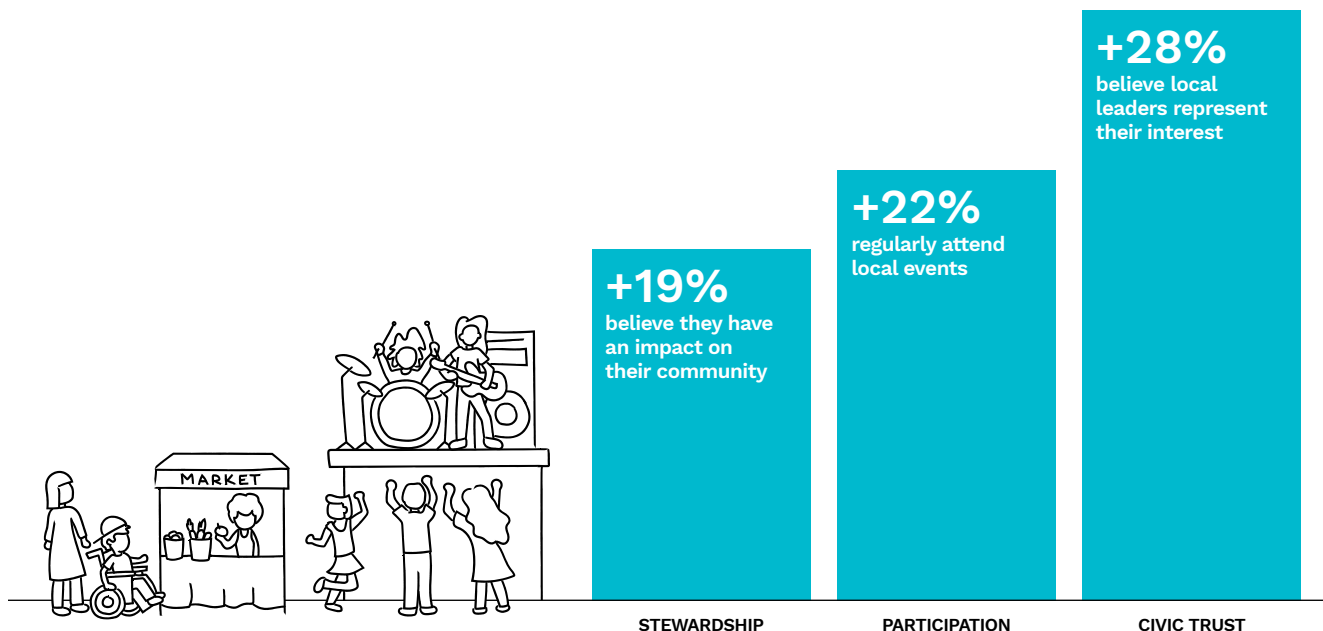
Research also points to a connection between community activities and informed local voting.

Analysis of a 2005 Gallup survey found that an increase in social offerings, from cultural activities to casual meeting spots, was associated with elevated measures of local voting—specifically, signing petitions and casting a ballot in local elections.⁶

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Community events and civic life

People who report a high number of events in their community score significantly better across measures of civic trust, participation, and stewardship relative to people living in places with few community events.⁷





Gallery Alley
Wichita, KS



Open Streets Detroit
Detroit, MI



Burien Town Square
Burien, WA

STRATEGIES

Make space for large and small events throughout the community—at parks, plazas, libraries, community centers, and other public spaces.

A range of public spaces can host organized programs or offer a casual place to relax on non-event days.

Design flexible public spaces that can accommodate different activities throughout the course of the day or week.

For example, provide moveable and adaptable furniture that allows visitors to shape space according to their needs. (SEE 6.1: PROVIDE SEATING OPTIONS)

Schedule temporary street closures to provide space for new activities and events.

Closing streets to vehicles opens up significant space for people and is a particularly useful strategy for neighborhoods where public space is scarce. Regularly-scheduled “play streets” support children’s recreation; seasonal “open streets” initiatives encourage pedestrian and recreational use; and occasional closures provide space for neighborhood festivals and street fairs.

Gallery Alley Downtown Wichita turns an underutilized alley into a vibrant, inviting public space through programming that features local musicians, movie nights, outdoor food festivals, local arts events, and more.

Open Streets Detroit An open streets festival organized by Human Scale Studio, Shipdaddy Studio, and the Downtown Detroit Partnership allows Detroiters to overtake their streets and enjoy their city in a new way, taking part in free, safe, and inclusive activities.

Burien Town Square Burien’s downtown master plan highlights community programming as a priority to support civic identity and community gathering. A weekly farmers market is just one of the community’s many popular events.

7.2 Support Informal Interactions

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Informal gathering spaces can support civic trust and participation in public life.

The concept of “third places” emerged in the 1990s, arguing for the essential value of spaces outside the home or workplace that promote social interaction and idea exchange.⁸



Well-designed and well-managed public plazas serve as vital social gathering spaces.⁹

Plazas offer respite in dense urban environments, providing a break from stressors like noise.¹⁰

Popular parks are connected to civic trust.

ACES respondents who live near a popular park used by many people were more likely to exhibit higher levels of civic trust (↑10%).¹¹

A study of affordable housing residents found that access to public spaces and community institutions is particularly important to their participation in public life.

Such spaces create key opportunities for observing and connecting with neighbors and strangers.²

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

Public Space Stewardship Guide San Francisco’s Public Space Stewardship Guide highlights models for public space management, including events-based models, public-private partnerships, and grassroots approaches. The guide offers ready-to-use templates for community members and advocates to make public spaces the best they can be.¹²



A toolkit for funding,
programming and maintenance



GovPorch
Charlotte, NC



Metro McAllen Swing-and-Ride Bus Stop
McAllen, TX



Michigan Ave Parklet
Detroit, MI

STRATEGIES

Create and update public plazas to ensure all neighborhoods have space for congregation and interaction.

Identify enthusiastic partners, such as community groups and merchant associations, who want to contribute to programming and upkeep.

Ensure parks and plazas can accommodate diverse, simultaneous uses.

Demarcate activity zones, for example with pathways, plantings, seating, shade, a performance area, or an athletic court.

Create tactical streetscape renovations and parklets that provide new nodes for interaction in the public realm.

These interventions can add new gathering spaces along commercial corridors or enhance the exterior of public buildings like community centers and libraries.

Bring games and activities for all ages into the public sphere.

Provide games such as ping pong, chess tables, or lawn sports that invite multigenerational use. Establish a communal resource such as a “Little Free Library”—small cabinets in public spaces where anyone is invited to borrow a book or leave one to share. Install interactive public art that invites collaboration and expression.

GovPorch Through incremental design and programming interventions, the City of Charlotte, in partnership with KaBOOM!, brought its overlooked government plaza to life.

Metro McAllen Swing-and-Ride Bus Stop The City of McAllen redesigned a typical McAllen bus stop near a popular public library, offering space for adults and children to play, paint, and exercise.

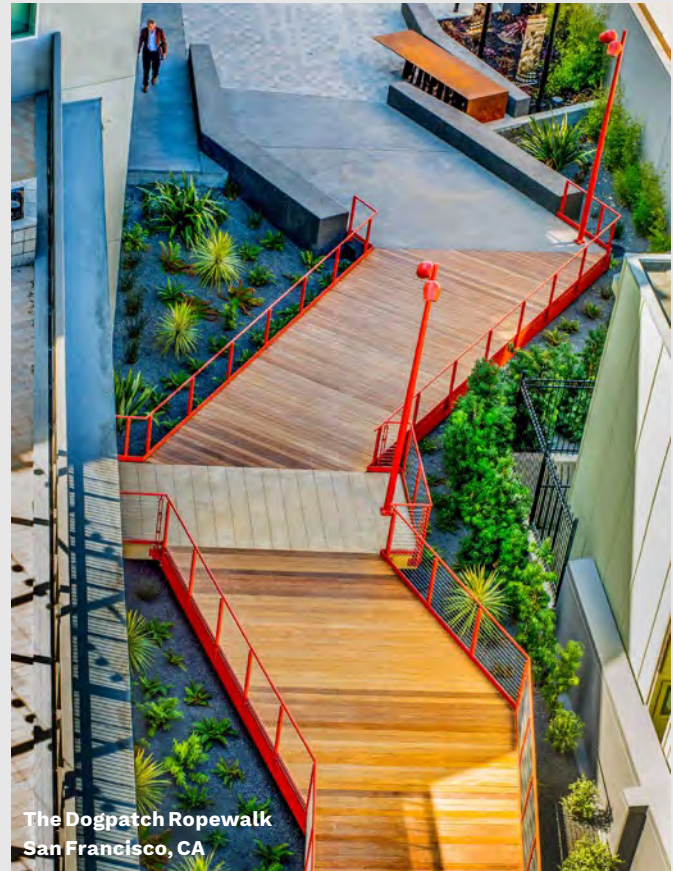
Michigan Ave Parklet To inspire dialogue around plans for a 9-lane state highway, Human Scale Studio led a project to reclaim part of the road with a parklet, and showcase how streets can offer space for interaction.

7.3

Reclaim Under-utilized Infrastructure

The history of urban development has left many cities with challenging physical barriers—elevated highways, rail lines, large industrial sites, or acres of underutilized parking. Such barriers have often disproportionately burdened low-income residents and communities of color.

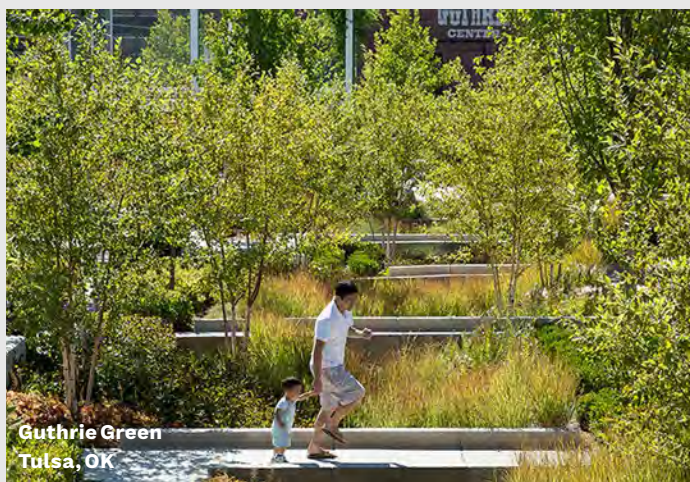
Many communities are working to transform physical barriers, reconnect fractured neighborhoods, and create new public spaces for interaction and activity. While a scholarly understanding is just emerging, stories from around the country suggest that community-driven efforts to reimagine the role of infrastructure can boost civic trust, participation, and stewardship.



The Dogpatch Ropewalk
San Francisco, CA



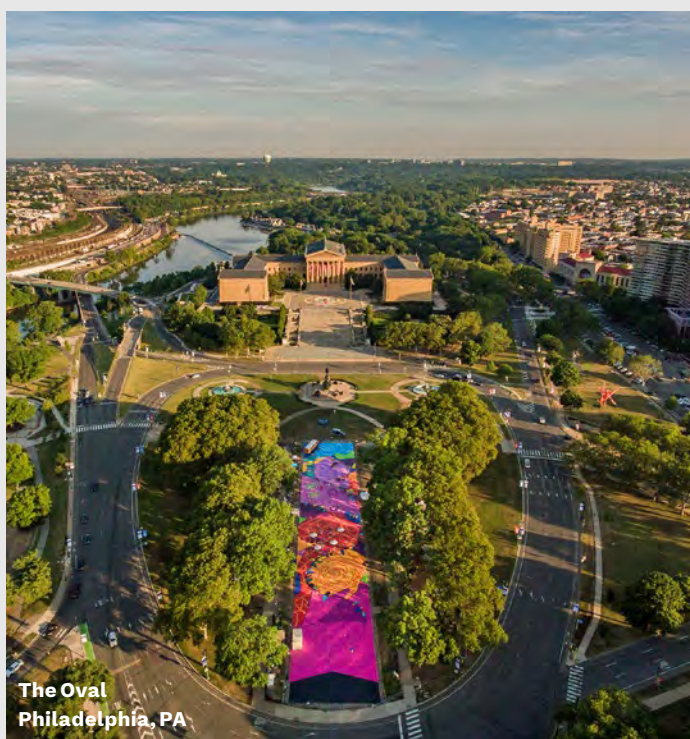
Atlanta BeltLine
Atlanta, GA



Guthrie Green
Tulsa, OK



The Underline
Miami, FL



The Oval
Philadelphia, PA

STRATEGIES

Clean up, rezone, and redevelop underutilized sites to create dynamic public gathering spaces.

Many communities have successfully redeveloped former industrial sites into beloved community assets.

Leverage transportation infrastructure to create linear parks and trails.

Communities are creating dynamic public spaces using the public rights-of-way associated with transportation infrastructure.

Enhance pedestrian and bicycle connections across large-scale infrastructure projects such as highways, railyards, and bridges.

Communities are using lighting and art to make overpasses and underpasses more comfortable, inviting, and visually interesting.

The Dogpatch Ropewalk The Dogpatch Ropewalk was designed by Fletcher Studio to evoke the history of the neighborhood's maritime industry while providing space for contemporary needs.

Atlanta BeltLine The Atlanta BeltLine is converting the city's peripheral abandoned rail yards into trails and linear parks, ultimately creating a 22-mile network that will connect the city's diverse neighborhoods.

Guthrie Green Designed by SWA Group, this former truck yard was converted into a public gathering space featuring gardens, a central lawn, a park pavilion, and a stage for festivals and concerts.

The Underline Friends of The Underline see enormous potential for the 10 miles of open space directly beneath Miami's elevated metro. Programming and art, such as this sculpture by artist Nicolas Lobo, are used to activate spaces along the route.

The Oval Since 2013, Fairmount Park Conservancy has led the charge for converting a highly visible stretch of Benjamin Franklin Parkway into a summer pop-up of programming and events.

LEARNING FROM FIELD RESEARCH

Activating a Government Plaza in Charlotte⁵

Does bringing play and whimsy to a public space affect the way citizens think about their local government? Can civic trust be improved with simple design elements, or is more intensive programming and activation required to change perceptions?

The City of Charlotte was considering these and other questions in the spring of 2017 when it embarked on “GovPorch,” an initiative to “put play back into public spaces.”

GovPorch featured design installations and activities in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Plaza—a space central to the downtown government district yet rarely used by the diverse citizens who frequent the area to pay bills, attend court hearings, and utilize government services. GovPorch sought to transform the plaza into an area where community members and government employees could interact with one another in a relaxed environment. The project incorporated a range of design elements like giant wind chimes, a ping pong table, and large beanbag chairs, as well as periodic events featuring live music and food trucks.

The Center for Active Design explored the impact of GovPorch using an intercept survey

conducted with individuals in and around the plaza. Surveys, which inquired about civic life outcomes such as community pride and trust in government, were conducted in three waves:

Baseline Survey Conducted before any changes had taken place.

Basic Design Survey Conducted after seating and play materials had been installed, including rocking chairs, wind chimes, and a ping pong table.

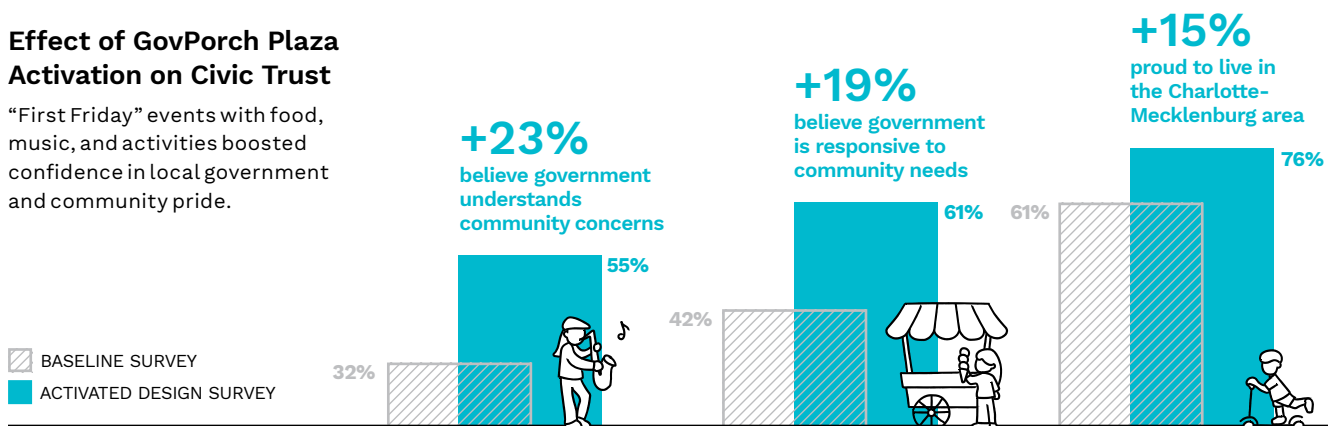
Activated Design Survey Conducted during two “First Friday” events when the space was activated with live music, interactive chalkboards, a mini-library, and food trucks.



FIGURE 1

Effect of GovPorch Plaza Activation on Civic Trust

“First Friday” events with food, music, and activities boosted confidence in local government and community pride.



Since the same questions were used for each wave of surveys, the CfAD research team was able to assess changes in perceptions around civic trust at each stage of intervention.

RESULTS

Surprisingly, researchers found no difference in civic life outcomes between the Baseline Survey and the Basic Design Survey. On their own, the small-scale design interventions did not seem to have an effect on civic trust. However, for the Activated Design Survey conducted on First Fridays, respondents were much more likely to think local government understood their concerns (↑23%), was responsive to their needs (↑19%), cared about improving resources for kids (↑17%), was fair to people like them (↑16%), and was full of friendly employees (↑13%). Respondents were also ↑15% more likely to say they were proud to live in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area when they visited the GovPorch on an activated First Friday compared to respondents visiting the plaza during the Baseline Survey. (SEE FIGURE 1)

These results indicate that GovPorch had a significant and positive impact on civic trust in the local community, but **only when the site was activated with interactive design and programming**. Without activation, the GovPorch installation had no effect.

Given the nature of the site, CfAD researchers hypothesize that the null findings around Basic Design interventions may be due to issues of visibility and familiarity. The plaza where GovPorch was installed is vast (approximately 15,000 square feet), and design interventions were only partially visible from the sidewalk. Most citizens walking by were not frequent visitors to the area and had minimal awareness of the plaza's existence. In fact, only 65% of respondents to the Baseline Survey knew they were passing by the plaza.

On the other hand, the First Friday events featured music, food trucks, and crowds that activated the plaza and encouraged more people to stop by and enjoy. Respondents attending First Friday events exhibited a notable boost in their perceptions of government responsiveness and trust in local government as a whole. These results point to two key recommendations for undertaking temporary installations—particularly in underutilized public spaces that are not commonly accessed by the community:

1. **Increase Visibility** Provide an attractive gateway, directional signage, and/or welcoming messages to make the installation more visible and invite passersby into the space. Ensure all community members get the message that “this place is for you.”
2. **Activate the Space** Schedule and publicize a series of events and programs that appeal to a wide range of community members, creating regular opportunities to attract new visitors and spark new connections at the site.

These lessons are important, considering that even small-scale projects can consume significant staff time, money, and planning and design resources. As Charlotte's Planning Coordinator and Urban Designer, Monica Holmes, notes: “The link between programming and capital investment is hugely important. Installations need something that gets people off of the street so they can really reap the full benefits of the project.” The GovPorch findings demonstrate that design that truly invites the community into a space is more likely to spark public use and enjoyment—and successfully inspire greater trust in local government.



Place Make the Vote
Long Beach, CA

A project of City Fabrik, Place Make the Vote creates festivities that engage the whole community, regardless of voting eligibility. Poll locations become a venue for games and activities, where kids, youth, and adults of all ages are invited to celebrate civic action.

place



Foster Local Democracy

8

Fruitful engagement with local government is at the heart of civic life. While political involvement is a core value of the American tradition, disconcerting trends indicate not everyone feels empowered to participate fully in local democratic processes.

In a study of major American cities, researchers at Portland State University found that, on average, fewer than 15% of eligible voters turned out to participate in local elections in 2016. Moreover, turnout varies dramatically across neighborhoods. Many cities have “voting deserts” where turnout is less than half of the citywide average.¹

A range of factors drive low voter participation, including lack of basic information about elections, such as polling station hours. Structural disparities such as inflexible work schedules, limited transportation options, and distances to polling stations also create significant barriers to voting, especially among economically disadvantaged communities.²⁻⁶

While some of these challenges are beyond the immediate purview of public space design, Assembly’s research indicates that design can create an important foundation for improving local democracy and opening the lines of communication between citizens and local government. Assembly’s research explores opportunities to leverage design to foster local democracy, reduce civic inequalities, and help all community members feel informed and empowered.

IN THIS SECTION

- 8.1 Improve Voting Access and Awareness
- 8.2 Increase Access to Community Information
- 8.3 Elevate the Visibility of Local Government
- 8.4 Support Community-Driven Design Processes

8.1 Improve Voting Access and Awareness

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE



Research indicates that voter turnout is higher when voting is more convenient.

One study found that centralized “vote centers” can help increase voter turnout by allowing voters from any precinct to show up and vote at centrally-located polling stations, while another study found voter turnout declines when polling stations are relocated and are difficult to find.^{7,8}

Proximity to polls is particularly significant for voters who do not own cars.

For those without access to a car, even a half-mile increase in distance to a polling station substantially reduces the likelihood that an individual will vote.⁵

Positive incentives and fun activities can help draw people to the polls.

A study of 14 communities across the United States found that Election Day festivals offering free food and music create a more celebratory and social environment for voting and are associated with higher voter turnout.⁹

STRATEGIES

Ensure polling locations are easily accessible to all residents.

Select sites along reliable public transit routes that have comfortable and safe access for pedestrians and cyclists. Calm traffic and update crosswalks near polls. Install ramps, seating, and other amenities to help all community members access the space. Establish centrally-located “vote centers” accessible to any voter. (SEE CHAPTER 1: ENHANCE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS)

Use signage to enhance the visibility of polling locations.

Wayfinding and signage indicating polling locations and hours of operations should be clearly legible and include non-English languages common in the area.

Hold Election Day festivals outside polling locations.

Provide food, performances, artwork, and activities to draw attention and make voting more fun. Ramp up temporary installations in the days leading up to Election Day to build awareness and attract new voters. (SEE 7.1: PROVIDE SPACE FOR PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS)



Place Make the Vote
Long Beach, CA



Place Make the Vote
Long Beach, CA



Next Stop: Democracy!
Philadelphia, PA



Lansie Sylvia
Next Stop Democracy!

For people to turn out and vote, they need to feel like their vote matters, every time, and that they have an important place within their communities. They have to have some faith in the government and feel a sense of not only civic duty, but civic pride.¹⁰ ”

Place Make the Vote PMTV developed a design toolkit to call attention to polling locations and motivate turnout in historically low-voting precincts.

Next Stop: Democracy! Next Stop: Democracy! believes that public art can be a powerful tool for inspiring voter engagement. Led by Lansie Sylvia, this project displays signs made by local artists to highlight polling sites on election days.

8.2 Increase Access to Community Information

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE

Increased government transparency and easy-to-navigate online information is linked to higher levels of civic trust.

One study found that the way people perceive online government information—whether it’s responsive, transparent, secure, efficient, and convenient—relates to how much people trust government in general.¹¹

Community information boards are associated with civic trust.

ACES survey respondents who reported the presence of an information board in their local park were more likely to exhibit elevated civic trust (↑7%) compared to those without a board.¹²

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Real-time transit data can increase civic trust

An ACES photo experiment explored the impacts of providing on-site, real-time transit information.¹²

METHOD

Each ACES respondent was randomly assigned just one photo and asked to respond to questions. They were told that in the community pictured, local bus service is fairly clean, although buses don’t come very often.

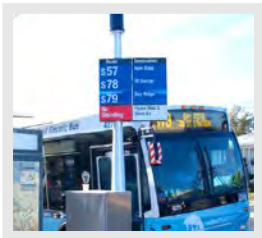
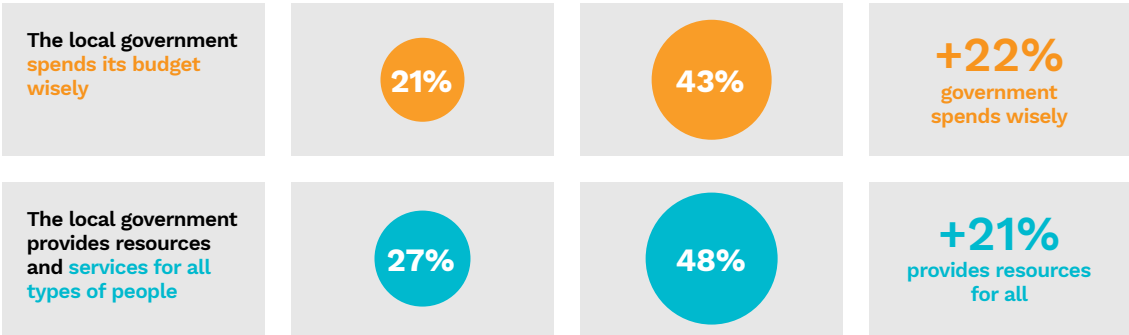
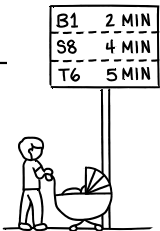
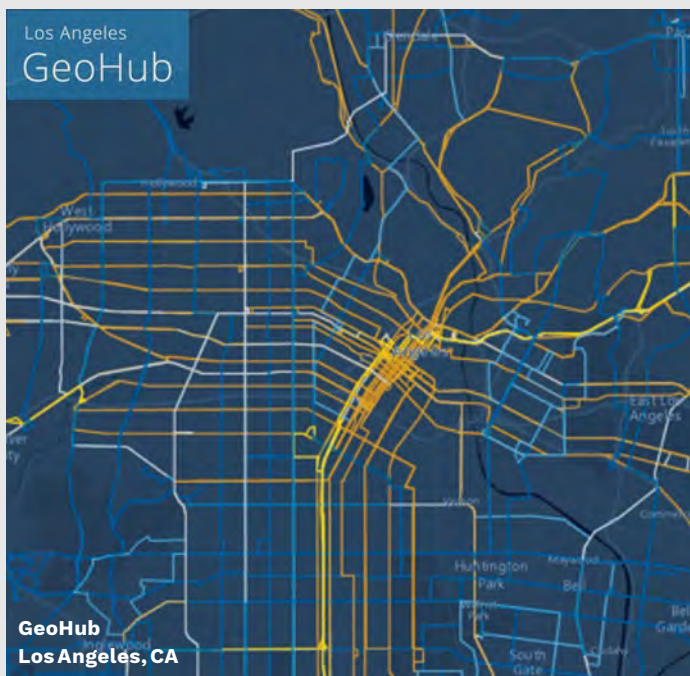


PHOTO 1
BUS STOP WITH STATIC SIGN



PHOTO 2
BUS STOP WITH DIGITAL SIGN





STRATEGIES

Ensure government information is easy to access and navigate.

Whether information is provided online, via phone, or through signs in the public realm, clear design and messaging can reinforce perceptions of transparency and efficiency.

Provide real-time, location-specific information about government services such as transit or sanitation schedules.

Digital signs, web-based tools, or telephone and texting services can help keep residents informed.

Install information boards to share details about community issues and events.

While online, real-time information may offer additional civic trust benefits, analog information boards still have a role to play—particularly in communities with limited digital access.



GeoHub GeoHub is LA's new public platform for exploring, visualizing, and downloading location-based open data. Maps allow users to analyze and combine open data layers, and the site supports the development of new web and mobile applications.

Select Bus Service NYC's Select Bus Service is making bus trips more efficient. PentaCityGroup partnered with the city's transit agency and DOT to convey real-time bus GPS information, along with signs displaying journey maps.

8.3 Elevate the Visibility of Local Government

CONNECTIONS TO CIVIC LIFE



In public-private partnerships, articulating public sector contributions can increase civic trust.

One ACES experiment described a hypothetical park being renovated with funding from both the Parks and Recreation Department and a private corporation, with a randomized prompt about how the improvements would be attributed. Respondents who were informed that a sign would credit the Parks and Rec department for the project were more likely to say “I would feel proud of the park” (↑6%) and “local citizens will take care of this park” (↑6%) compared to those who were told the park improvements would be attributed to the private company.¹²

ORIGINAL RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

Outdoor community meetings spark interest

An ACES photo experiment tested whether holding a community board meeting outdoors might influence interest in attending, using sample flyers with two different images.¹²

METHOD

Each ACES respondent was randomly assigned just one flyer and asked to imagine it was their own community and respond to questions.



PHOTO 1
IMAGE ON FLYER 1:
INDOOR MEETING



PHOTO 2
IMAGE ON FLYER 2:
OUTDOOR MEETING



I would be **very interested** in attending this meeting

24%

45%

+21%
very interested

STRATEGIES

Ensure signage and messaging acknowledge the role of local government in improving and maintaining public spaces and buildings.

Even for projects with significant private investment, it is important to keep the public role visible.

Promote community meetings by increasing advertising and testing new venues.

Consider hosting a seasonal meeting in a visible outdoor public space. Celebrate and publicize the location shift as a way to attract first-time attendees.



Mayor's Fix-It Team
San Francisco, CA



Diversity Plaza
Queens, NY



Diversity Plaza
Queens, NY

Mayor's Fix-It Team The Fix-It Team seeks to improve the quality of life in San Francisco's neighborhoods by collaborating with residents to address public space cleanliness and safety issues that affect their lives. (SEE P. 110)

Diversity Plaza Diversity Plaza reflects the cultural identity of Jackson Heights, Queens, the city's most diverse neighborhood. A temporary plaza on the site created much-needed space for community programs and outdoor meetings. In these photos, Mayor de Blasio attends a groundbreaking for construction of a permanent plaza.

8.4

Support Community- Driven Design Processes

Involving residents in the design process helps shape public spaces according to the needs and desires of the local community. Projects from around the country demonstrate that bringing diverse community voices to the table can inspire greater participation and stewardship among residents.^{13,14}

Reimagining the Civic Commons This multi-city effort is revitalizing cultural and civic assets around the country. The initiative is supported by multiple philanthropic partners and relies on community input to reimagine essential public spaces.

Rail Trail Symphony Thanks to a KaBOOM! Play Everywhere grant, Charlotte Center City Partners engaged the community in creating a music-themed activity space along the Charlotte Rail Trail.

Open Streets 704 The City of Charlotte and community partners coordinate Open Streets 704, an annual event that invites all members of the community to shape their city.

Designing Calle Ocho This community placemaking initiative led by Urban Impact Lab transformed a hazardous multi-lane street in Little Havana into a pedestrian- and bike-friendly public space.



Reimagining the Civic Commons
Akron, OH



Rail Trail Symphony
Charlotte, NC



STRATEGIES

At the outset of a design project, work with community members to research and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the site.

Interview users to learn more about what the space means to them and what they value most. Seek out groups who aren't using the space to learn what might be deterring them. Collaboratively consider how design can respond to community aspirations and local challenges.

Stage on-site events and design activities that appeal to a diversity of participants.

Strive to engage and empower those who may have been left out of past planning efforts, such as communities of color, low-income residents, seniors, children, and young adults.

Display design concepts and elicit feedback through interactive posters, suggestion boxes, or comment boards.

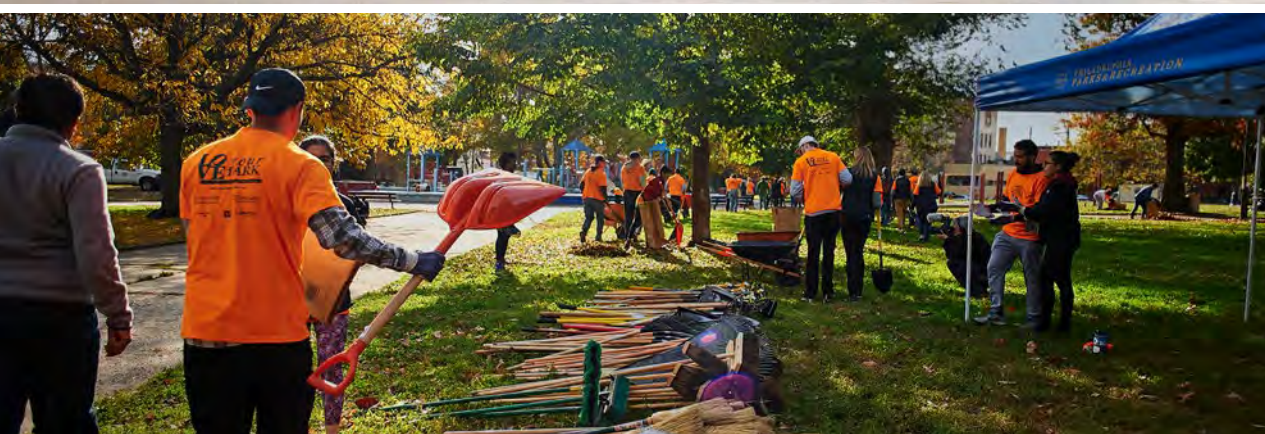
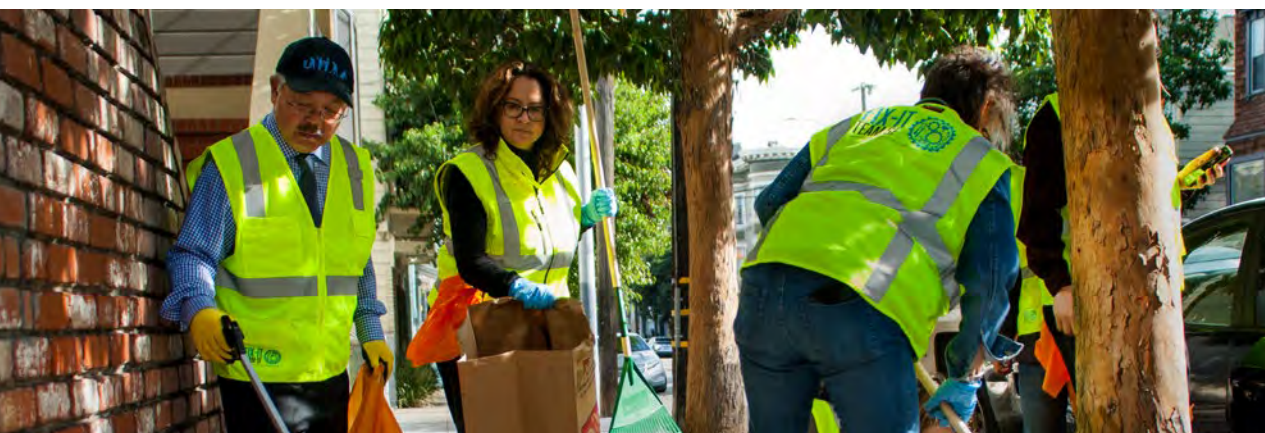
Create opportunities for visitors and passersby to tell stories, share their vision for the space, or vote for their preferred design options.

Collaborate with community members to create tactical, temporary design elements such as moveable seating, play spaces, and artwork.

Observe how visitors engage with various design elements to inform more permanent design solutions.

Engage community members in participatory budgeting processes that help set public space priorities.

Such community involvement lays the groundwork for collaboration and support in future public space planning and maintenance.



Stories from the Field

The *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines* draw upon extensive findings that convey what communities can do to lay a strong foundation for civic life. Yet when it comes to implementing the Guidelines, each community must define its own path—one that responds to unique local context and accounts for complex political, economic, and demographic dynamics.

The following pages show strategies from the Assembly Guidelines at work in five communities across the country. These projects feature a diversity of contexts and design interventions—from major capital improvements, to short-term tactical projects, to ongoing maintenance partnerships. Their stories speak to local community challenges as well as key partnerships that have led to implementation successes. Offering crucial perspectives from project designers, managers, and community members, the Stories from the Field demonstrate how the design and maintenance of public spaces can play a pivotal role in the civic life of communities.

Detroit RiverFront Conservancy

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

The Dequindre Cut draws a line through downtown Detroit along a former railroad track, providing pedestrians and cyclists with direct access to Detroit's waterfront.





1.2 Expand Transportation Options

3.1 Improve with Trees and Plantings

3.3 Celebrate Unique Natural Assets

4.1 Use Local Arts to Inspire and Engage

4.2 Connect Diverse Local Cultures

6.3 Provide Water and Restrooms

6.4 Tailor Design to Local Climate

7.1 Provide Space for Programming and Events

7.3 Reclaim Underutilized Infrastructure

Activities for all ages and abilities
draw visitors year-round to
Detroit's vibrant waterfront.





Detroit's riverfront tells a compelling story of urban transformation. During the 20th century, the land fronting the Detroit River was dominated by industry. As those industries declined, the land languished in decay, marred by crime and pollution. Today that same waterfront is home to world-class parks, transformed by a remarkable community vision and the guidance of an innovative group of civic and community leaders determined to provide **safe, green, and accessible recreation space for all**.

Formed in 2003, the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy has helped shape Detroit's waterfront vision, and the group's tireless advocacy is an international success story. The Conservancy has won over Detroit's residents, institutions, and corporations. General Motors and The Kresge Foundation provided significant seed funding for the project, initiating a highly successful and ongoing **public-private partnership**. Meanwhile, the Conservancy has woven **extensive community input into an actionable vision** for the riverfront, offering a powerful model of civic leadership.

Detroit's remade riverfront is highly accessible, a destination and gathering spot for everyone in the city. The Dequindre Cut, a decommissioned train track running along the spine of downtown Detroit, maximizes access to the riverfront. This vital piece of reused **infrastructure has been reclaimed for pedestrians and cyclists**, so that Detroiters can now get to their riverfront through a slice of urban greenery dotted with public art and congregation spaces.

We think it's so important that we have these options available... to be able to have a venue that's safe and accessible for our community, and that's also clean and fun... to be able to celebrate the jewel that is our river.¹

Detroit resident



Bringing government services within reach of community members, Detroit's popular "Touch-a-Truck" event highlights the importance of bringing community information and government services into public space.





More than three miles of linear waterfront parks now teem with activity, **attracting three million visitors each year**. An emphasis on everyday comfort—providing amenities like shade stations, water fountains, cafes, and bathrooms—allows people to linger and bask in a space where others are doing the same. Children splash in fountains, people roam butterfly gardens and bike on greenways, and crowds gather for concerts, festivals, and community yoga.

Even in the harshest of winters, Detroiters flock to their beloved riverfront. The Conservancy clears snow and offers winter-themed activities to support **year-round enjoyment of the park**. Facilitating everyday activity in this way keeps this public space alive and active, while marquee events with regional appeal punctuate the seasons with massive crowds. At the annual River Days Festival, admission prices are kept intentionally low, or even free, to ensure cost is not a barrier to participation.

For generations, Detroiters could see an attractive, inviting waterfront across the river on the banks of Windsor, Ontario. Today, Detroit's transformed riverfront is a model for any community that has looked across the water and wondered, "Why not us?"

You see visitors from out of town and Detroiters who live in the neighborhoods; you see folks who are new to the city and folks who have been here for 85 years. It's a special place where everyone feels pride in this community, where everyone can get along and be themselves.²

Mark Wallace
President & CEO, Detroit RiverFront Conservancy



Mayor's Fix-It Team

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

The Fix-It Team was inaugurated under the late Mayor Ed Lee to improve the condition of San Francisco's public spaces.





2.1 Mitigate Litter

2.3 Maintain What Matters Most

3.1 Improve with Trees and Plantings

8.2 Increase Access to Community Information

8.3 Elevate the Visibility of Local Government

San Francisco is a rapidly changing city. Amid an influx of wealth and a booming population, affordability and displacement have become pressing challenges. In recent years, residents have reported a decline in quality of life measures despite a dramatic increase in corporate investment in the city. Negative perceptions of the public realm have contributed to this collective sense of decline, with complaints of overgrown greenery, dirty conditions at public transit stations, inadequate lighting, and overflowing litter. The city has responded by introducing a **Mayor's Fix-It Team, offering a practical, replicable model for addressing public realm maintenance concerns.**

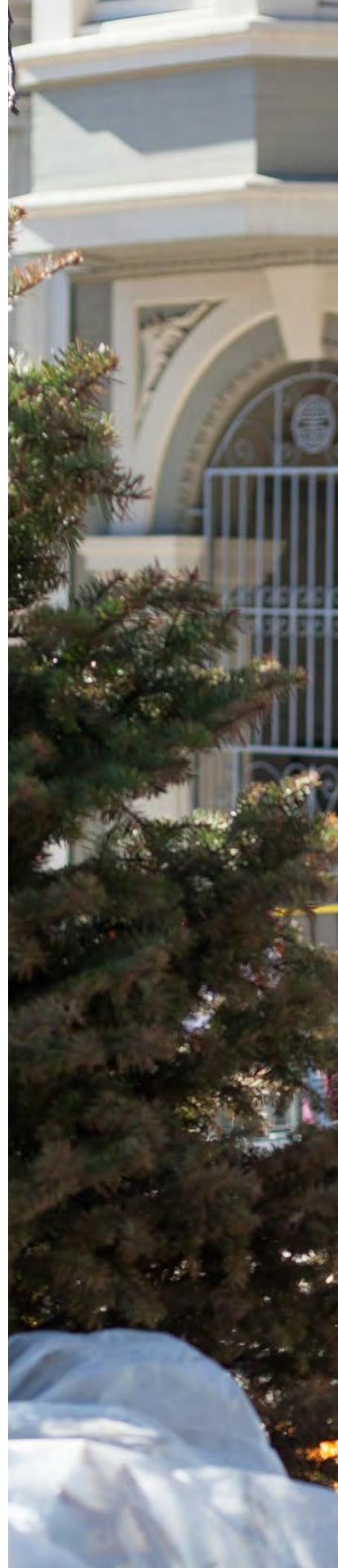
Community members have long-advocated for better maintenance of public spaces, but did not know how to petition city services spread across multiple departments. **Fix-It provides a platform for collaboration** among City agencies, community partners, and neighborhood residents. The creation of this innovative, inter-agency response team stems directly from the late San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee's "Clean & Safe Neighborhood Promise"—a commitment to uphold the safety of residents and the cleanliness of their neighborhoods.

The Fix-It Team embarked on an extensive participatory process, surveying residents on quality of life priorities and perceptions and linking their responses with data collected from San Francisco's 3-1-1 reporting system.

Through our Civic Center beautification and peer-to-peer street outreach initiatives, our unhoused or at-risk participants have the opportunity to be a part of the community again, connecting others to the services that have benefited them, and becoming the heroes that remove over 25,000 pounds of debris and a thousand needles from these city streets each month.

Brandon Davis
Downtown Streets Team

”





Volunteers are an essential element of Fix-It Team's success. Donning colorful vests, volunteers are visible signs of the city's commitment to creating clean and safe neighborhoods for community residents.

This **data-driven approach** allowed the Fix-It Team to examine nuanced concerns from neighborhood to neighborhood, tailoring with each community an action plan to fix priority maintenance issues. To date, the Fix-It Team's action plans have **engaged over 1,200 residents** through community and one-on-one meetings and **fixed over 3,500 neighborhood concerns**.

Over 20 neighborhoods, or “zones,” have been identified for targeted improvements through Fix-It's data-driven process. In addition to survey data and 3-1-1 monitoring, an **equity measure overlay** ensures that the process prioritizes zones with low-income communities or other vulnerable populations. Fix-It demonstrates the power of data—made more powerful when bolstered by the on-the-ground expertise of local residents.

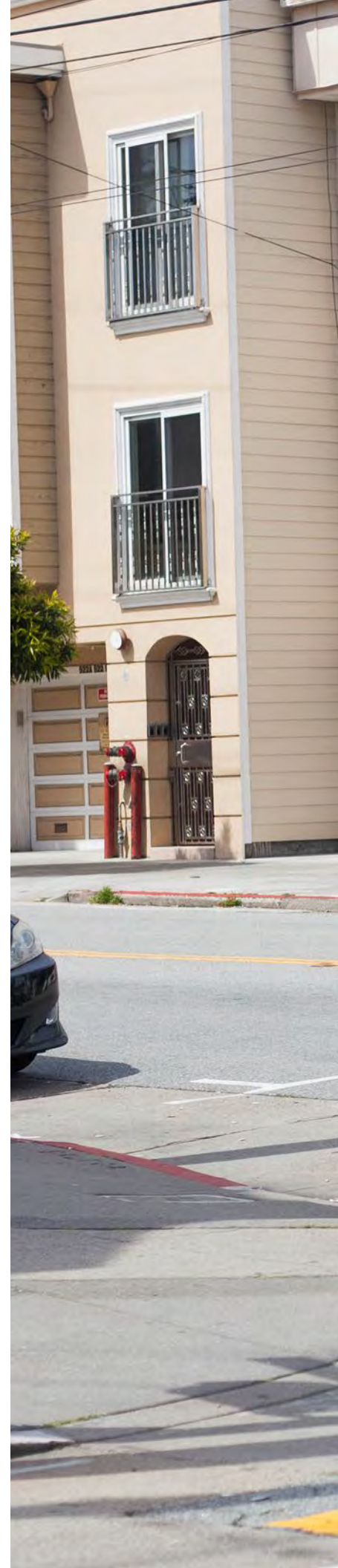
While Fix-It's approach relies on technology, it also recognizes the importance of working with the people most directly affected by the initiative, **collaborating with partners to draft a workforce ready and able to act as stewards of their streets**. Often this workforce is composed of those most familiar with the challenges of street life: San Francisco's homeless and at-risk population. Fix-It and City agencies routinely partner with non-profits whose mission is to support at-risk and vulnerable downtown populations, including Downtown Streets Team and Hunters Point Family. These collaborations result in a workforce comprised of the very people who are most impacted by the condition of San Francisco's streets and public spaces.

In a city with complex quality of life concerns, Fix-It demonstrates the power of involving everyone in the care and improvement of their city.

By listening to residents through community meetings and walking their neighborhood with them, they are able to speak to city officials directly, and prioritize fixes in their neighborhood.³

Sandra Zuniga
Executive Director, San Francisco Fix-It Team

”



Fix-It Team demonstrates that simple interventions like fresh crosswalk paint or street lighting repairs can improve a community's trust and appreciation in local government.



Glen Oaks Branch Library

QUEENS, NEW YORK

Beckoning community members to enter and “SEARCH,” the Glen Oaks Branch Library is an airy, visually compelling civic asset that incorporates welcoming design, including its glass façade, pedestrian-scale lighting, greenery, and seating.



- 
- 1.1 Put Pedestrian Needs First
 - 1.2 Expand Transportation Options

- 3.1 Improve with Trees and Plantings

- 4.2 Connect Diverse Local Cultures

- 5.1 Create Welcoming Entrances
- 5.2 Use Positive Messaging

- 6.1 Provide Seating Options
- 6.2 Illuminate Public Spaces and Buildings

The library stacks are sunk in a day-lit basement level in order to prioritize street-level, visible programming and community spaces, including an adjacent reading garden available for community use.





Today's libraries are adapting to meet a wide range of community needs, offering everything from computer classes to daycare, from English as a Second Language courses to forums on community issues. In Queens, New York the recently opened Glen Oaks Branch Library—situated in one of the most diverse communities in America—is an inspiring example of the role design can play in supporting the important work of public libraries. **The new Glen Oaks library addresses the needs of the surrounding community and serves as an epicenter of cultural exchange.**

Situated on a heavily trafficked thoroughfare, the previous Glen Oaks' building had a brick, nearly windowless façade. The design of the new building emphasizes **transparency and visibility**, creating an inviting structure that demystifies library activities and beckons to passersby. The popular children's reading room offers clear sight lines to the surrounding neighborhood and is visible from the front entrance.

The design team created a new public plaza, giving the library a “front porch” that encourages informal gathering. Pedestrian-scale lighting; attractive, well-maintained greenery; and simple, modern wooden benches provide a safe and welcoming spot for library visitors to rest, connect with nature, read a book, or watch city life go by.



The new library is so bright and spacious, it makes people want to spend time there. The teens and kids sections are made into spaces where individuals can stay and finish homework and gives children a safe environment to hang out in. More than ever, it's a community hub for the neighborhood. There's also now this beautiful space outside to hang out with friends or just take a book and read.

Vaidehi Jokhakar
Glen Oaks Library Patron



Views of the surrounding neighborhood and positive signs reinforce patrons' sense of welcome and social ties. Here, playful digital signage hangs over the children's reading area.





Despite its semi-suburban context, Glen Oaks **supports a range of transportation options**. In addition to being pedestrian friendly, the library offers bike parking near the entrance. The building's redesign also features seats adjacent to a nearby public bus stop and an awning to shelter bus riders from rush-hour sun or inclement weather.

Glen Oaks incorporates **public art that celebrates the diversity of the neighborhood**. The word "SEARCH" is etched into the building's glass exterior in **over 30 languages**, capturing the neighborhood's polyglot character. "SEARCH" also towers over the library's entrance, appearing and fading throughout the day depending on the angle of the sun.

Glen Oaks' design supports civic life by facilitating **community connections**—providing a beloved space to learn, gather, and connect to the surrounding neighborhood.

[This design] replaced a small, nondescript box-of-a-library, and as soon as it opened, usage immediately skyrocketed. It functions wonderfully as a library, with separate areas for teens, adults, children, programs, technology and an outdoor reading area...At night, it is a beacon for the whole neighborhood.

Bridget Quinn-Carey
CEO, Hartford Public Library
Past Interim President and CEO, Queens Library



Love Your Park: Fairmount Park Conservancy

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Supplies await eager volunteers who dedicate their time to steward local parks in Philadelphia. The city's Love Your Park program matches local park advocates with small maintenance jobs during a week-long celebration of cherished public spaces.



2.1 Mitigate Litter

2.3 Maintain What Matters Most

3.1 Improve with Trees and Plantings

7.1 Provide Space for Programming and Events

8.3 Elevate the Visibility of Local Government

8.4 Support Community-Driven Design Processes

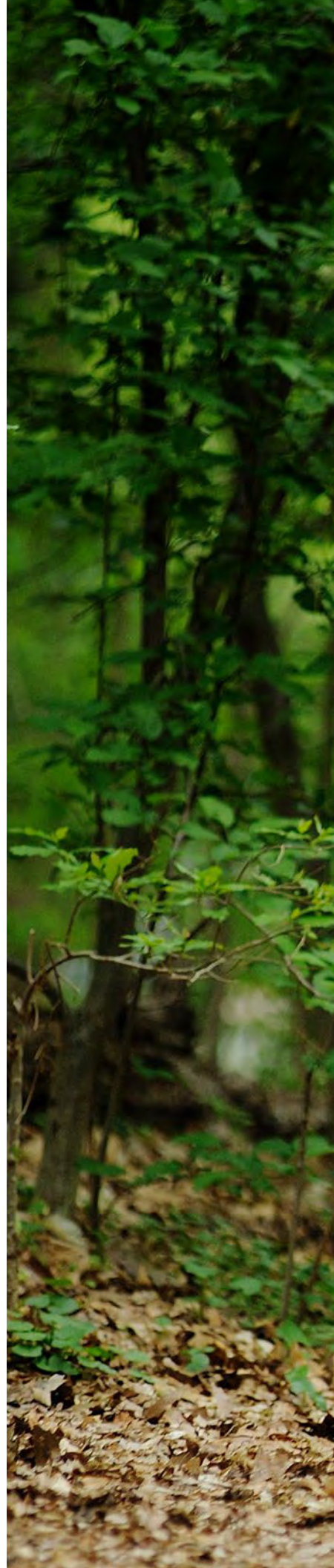
Keeping Philadelphia's parks in good repair requires much work and many hands. Luckily the city has Fairmount Park Conservancy, a non-profit organization that partners with Philadelphia's Parks & Recreation Department to manage the city's 10,000+ acres of open space. The Conservancy **fosters community-driven stewardship, helping to activate public spaces and maintain one of the largest urban park systems in the world.**

Under the leadership of the Conservancy, Philadelphia boasts **over 100 neighborhood Park Friends Groups**—volunteer chapters made up of deeply invested residents who dedicate their time and energy to maintaining their local parks. While Park Friends Groups independently oversee these volunteer activities, the Conservancy unites and organizes the chapters for larger-scale initiatives, convening them throughout the year for ongoing learning and networking opportunities. Their signature collaborative effort happens during **“Love Your Park” week, which attracts 4,000+ volunteers** twice a year to bag leaves, paint fences, plant trees, and tackle small repairs in parks across the city.

Love Your Park is phenomenally successful at bringing together community members from all parts of the city, while also **leveraging corporate and government support.** Corporate sponsors see Love Your Park as an opportunity to align themselves with community improvements and fun activities. Love Your Park also helps mobilize political support to fund park maintenance efforts, demonstrating that small-scale maintenance activities, multiplied across a network of parks, can provide a large-scale benefit to the city.

City government can't do it alone. Nonprofits can't do it alone. Citizens can't do it alone. You've got to have all three working together.

Jennifer Mahar
Fairmount Park Conservancy



Volunteers take a break from chipping in to enjoy the outdoors. Coupling upkeep with festivities boosts Love Your Park's emphasis on appreciating park spaces.



The Love Your Park initiative is complemented by a series of programs and activities that attract even more visitors to their local park and turn a day of stewardship into a festive celebration.

The Conservancy leverages local media to raise awareness of park stewardship and garner continued support from corporate and government partners. Every year, Love Your Park's kick-off press conference moves to a new location, spotlighting a "signature site" and its associated Park Friends Group. This press event recognizes the hard work that goes into caring for public space—and shows local representatives and community members that park improvements are readily achievable.

Love Your Park succeeds in creating a powerful stewardship force greater than the sum of its parts, by connecting separate volunteer groups across the city and leveraging the power of thousands of individuals making a visible difference throughout the city on the very same day.

In this time of upheaval, when people need positive things, this park reinforces the good things people can do together.⁴

Mary Ann Lancaster Tyler
Friend of Cliveden Park

”





Philadelphia's youngest stewards
enjoy Love Your Park's festive,
family-friendly activities.

Better Block

MULTIPLE CITIES

Using everyday supplies and volunteer power, Better Block's community-driven process reshapes streetscapes and showcases how reimagining public space can invite interaction.

A vibrant night scene of a crowded pedestrian street. The street is paved with bricks and lined with trees and buildings. A large crowd of people is walking and standing, some looking at their phones. A food stall with a white canopy is on the right. The scene is illuminated by warm streetlights and colorful string lights hanging from the trees. The overall atmosphere is lively and festive.

1.1 Put Pedestrian Needs First

1.2 Expand Transportation Options

4.1 Use Local Arts to Inspire and Engage

6.1 Provide Seating Options

7.2 Support Informal Interactions

8.4 Support Community-Driven Design Processes

Better Block's offerings have grown to include Wikiblock, a digital library of attractive street furniture. This design catalog is free to access for public space advocates the world over. Furniture designs require minimal assembly.





Sometimes to imagine change, you have to see it—and to change the rules, you have to break them. In 2010, when Jason Roberts and a small band of friends set out to make the street life in their Dallas neighborhood more vibrant, they discovered that their ideas for new planters, street furniture, signage, and other sidewalk enhancements conflicted with long-standing city ordinances—requiring permits, hefty fees, and painstaking approvals. Instead of waiting, they bypassed formal procedures and implemented their ideas practically overnight. Better Block was born.

The first Better Block used homemade supplies, volunteer labor, and word of mouth to attract community participation. Neighbors turned out to experience a familiar street in an exciting new way, and many became advocates for improved streetscapes in Dallas. Better Block reinforced the need for policy reform by posting signage that alerted residents and city leaders to the code infractions that their desired street-scape changes were incurring. Since then, the Better Block approach—using **simple, low-cost, tactical methods to reclaim and reshape public space** in support of more vibrant neighborhoods—has been **replicated in 32 communities around the world since 2016**.

Better Block shows communities the possibility of reimagining public spaces, and gives neighbors the tools and resources needed to affect change. No two Better Block projects are the same. Each strives to **respond to a community's unique context**, reflecting the priorities of residents as well as City Hall. The process begins with residents helping to workshop and refine design and implementation ideas in collaboration with Better Block team members. Ninety to 120 days later, volunteers equipped with a bevy of hardware tools and supplies take to the streets and remake their public space. Local artists celebrate the flavor of the neighborhood by **creating place-specific artwork**.

Changing your place doesn't have to be a daunting task that's left to experts. There are small, simple changes that amateurs can make at the block level that have dramatic ripple effects which cascade through the city.

Jason Roberts
Founding Director of Better Block





With little more than off-the-shelf paint, residents are able to use Better Block's tactics to experience a street in an entirely new way. Here, freshly painted bike lanes invite first-time cyclists to explore their community on two wheels.



This type of process, often termed “tactical design” or “placemaking,” offers a powerful tool for **testing design concepts with communities**. Residents can use impermanent, affordable methods to experiment with their public spaces. The process can nurture new urban advocates (and even win over skeptics), who can then petition for longer-term design fixes to enhance the vitality of their neighborhoods.

Better Block **design concepts are open-source**, available online at no cost to communities. The Better Block catalog of street furniture, originally little more than palettes and plywood, now encompasses everything from bus stops to retail kiosks and parklets. Industrial designers have crafted ingenious furniture designs and uploaded them to an online resource known as **Wikiblock**, where the whole world can download, construct, and prototype street furniture based on the needs of their individual community.

At the heart of Better Block’s success is the idea that impermanent design elements can be beautiful. Attractive, temporary design elements allow local residents and community leaders to test ideas, visualize public space improvements, and advocate for more permanent community enhancements.

In just eight hours, our community’s vision became a reality. If only for a short time, we saw what it would be like to bring our Main Street back to life. Although Better Block and its design were only temporary, and the paint is now washed away, the inspiration of what our community can be lives on.

Kelly Genners

Ottumwa Regional Legacy Foundation with Ottumwa Better Block

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Appendix

ACES Methodology

The Assembly Civic Engagement Survey (ACES)

The first ACES survey was fielded in 2016 and captured data from over 5,188 respondents in 26 cities across the United States. The second ACES survey was conducted in the summer of 2017 with over 1,600 respondents in ten cities. In order to account for the variation of diverse economic conditions, demographics, and population densities across these communities, ACES results presented in these Guidelines are drawn from research models that control for a host of individual-level and geographic variables and are statistically significant to at least a 95% confidence level.

CfAD published results in the spring of 2017 as the *Assembly Civic Engagement Survey: Key findings and design implications*, which is available for free download at centerforactivedesign.org. Many of these findings, as well as previously unpublished findings, are included throughout the *Assembly Civic Design Guidelines*.

ACES photo experiments

While survey data is helpful in establishing a relationship between variables, it cannot be used to infer whether changes in one variable *directly* cause changes in another variable. To address this gap, both ACES survey instruments incorporated a series of photo experiments that explore the causal impacts of design. For each photo experiment, CfAD developed two to three images that were identical save for minor differences in a particular design element.

For example, in one experiment shown on page 62, CfAD used two photos of an identical library; one image had greenery and seating around the entrance, while the other did not. Respondents were then randomly assigned just one of these images, and all respondents were asked the same questions related to civic life. Because the photo treatments were randomly assigned, any difference in the civic life measures can be directly attributed to the differences in design.

A note on ACES findings

ACES analysis uses both individual variables as well as indexed variables that synthesize and compile feedback on a range of survey questions. For example, the Civic Trust index is comprised of more than 10 different ACES survey questions on community pride, trust in local government, and trust in neighbors. Facts and figures referencing the broad categories of “civic trust,” “participation,” “stewardship,” and “local voting” all refer to indexed variables. A complete list of questions for each index can be found in the 2017 ACES publication, *Assembly Civic Engagement Survey: Key findings and design implications*.

For additional details about methodology, please contact the Center for Active Design at info@centerforactivedesign.org.

The Assembly initiative is a collaborative effort, synthesizing a multiplicity of voices and fields of expertise. This closing section captures the full range of resources and contributors that made this publication possible.

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Assembly Checklist

This checklist synthesizes all strategies found in the *Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines*. Communities are encouraged to collaborate across public, private, and community organizations to implement all applicable strategies and maximize civic life.

1 ENHANCE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

1.1 Put Pedestrian Needs First

	Create a comprehensive pedestrian network that allows residents to walk anywhere in the community.
	Calm traffic to reduce vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian safety.
	Provide sidewalk amenities such as benches, trees, and lighting to support pedestrian comfort.
	Design buildings and sites to prioritize pedestrians and create visual interest along the sidewalk.

1.2 Expand Transportation Options

	Develop a network of safe, continuous bicycle lanes and related bicycle infrastructure.
	Develop multi-use trails and greenways.
	Enhance transit systems by increasing frequency of service, improving reliability, and making transit stops more comfortable and accessible.
	Adopt policies to ensure road improvements address the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

1.3 Diversify Land Use

	Zone for a diverse mix of land uses, across neighborhoods and within individual buildings, to enhance residents' access to community assets.
	Incentivize development to fill gaps in neighborhoods burdened with abandoned lots or high vacancy rates.
	Encourage economically diverse housing throughout the community.

2 PRIORITIZE MAINTENANCE

2.1 Mitigate Litter

	Upgrade trash and recycling receptacles.
	Encourage stewardship with playful and informational clean-up campaigns.
	Increase garbage and recycling collection as well as street cleaning.
	Build collaborative maintenance partnerships to address concerns around litter and neighborhood upkeep.

2.2 Clean Up Vacant Lots

	Sustain basic maintenance conditions in all publicly-owned vacant lots.
	Enforce property maintenance standards for privately-owned vacant lots.
	Foster community-based stewardship (and ownership) of vacant lots.

2.3 Maintain What Matters Most

	Prioritize maintenance of park amenities catering to children, young adults, and families.
	Identify areas where meticulous maintenance may be unnecessary.
	Ensure lighting is well maintained and designed for pedestrian comfort.
	Invite civic organizations and local residents to participate in maintenance efforts.

3 INCORPORATE NATURE

3.1 Improve with Trees and Plantings

	Increase street trees and plantings and ensure ongoing upkeep.
	Weave natural elements into parks and playgrounds.
	Use nature to enhance public buildings.
	Require inclusion of trees and green space in all new developments and major renovations.

3.2 Encourage Community Gardening

	Add community gardens to existing civic assets such as parks, schools, and community centers.
	Encourage community gardens within larger residential developments.
	Provide tools and incentives to encourage community gardening on vacant lots.
	Design community gardens to support access for all ages and abilities.

3.3 Celebrate Unique Natural Assets

	Design public spaces to reflect and respond to local geography.
	Support direct interaction with nature through free and low-cost activities.
	Invest in public space and transportation improvements so all community members can access natural areas.

4 CELEBRATE COMMUNITY IDENTITY

4.1 Use Local Arts to Inspire and Engage

	Increase access to arts and cultural venues and events.
	Bring arts and cultural events into the public realm.
	Engage local artists, schools, and community groups to create locally-driven public art.

4.2 Connect Diverse Local Cultures

	Ensure parks and plazas respond to local cultures.
	Install multi-lingual signs at public spaces and civic buildings.
	Celebrate diversity through local programming and events.

4.3 Preserve and Repurpose Historic Assets

	Advance local preservation initiatives, garnering funds to revitalize historic public assets.
	Adapt declining historic sites to serve contemporary needs.
	Look for small-scale opportunities to reinforce local history and identity.

4.4 Showcase Local Food

	Use markets to introduce local food into public spaces and buildings.
	Plan community events around food.
	Promote the value of local food through branding and marketing initiatives.

5 MAKE PUBLIC SPACES WELCOMING

5.1 Create Welcoming Entrances

	Visually articulate entrances to parks, plazas, and other public spaces.
	Improve the “front porch” of civic buildings with modest enhancements such as seating, plantings, or lighting.
	Make it easier to see into public spaces and buildings. Minimize walls and fencing around parks and plazas; use windows and glass façades to increase visibility into public buildings.

5.2 Use Positive Messaging

	Install positive signs that encourage visitors to enter public spaces and make use of amenities.
	Make signs easy to read for everyone. Use clear language, avoid jargon, and introduce multi-lingual signs as appropriate.

5.3 Make Navigation Intuitive

	Use signs, symbols, and maps to point the way to local civic assets.
	Support intuitive navigation within public spaces and buildings by providing clear, easy-to-read signs and enticing pathways.
	Install information boards or service desks at entrances.

6 MAKE PUBLIC SPACES COMFORTABLE

6.1 Provide Seating Options

	Provide moveable seating in public spaces and buildings.
	Create nodes of shared seating such as long picnic tables, parklets, or amphitheater-style seating that places different groups in close proximity.
	Place stationary benches throughout the community to provide predictable places to rest, wait, or socialize.
	Design quality public seating that reflects local identity and character.

6.2 Illuminate Public Spaces and Buildings

	Tailor lighting to the needs of pedestrians rather than cars, positioning lamps to minimize glare and shadows.
	Install celebratory lighting to illuminate public spaces at night.
	Improve lighting around public buildings, particularly those that host evening events and activities such as schools, libraries, and community centers.

6.3 Provide Water and Restrooms

	Make drinking water readily available in public spaces—especially parks, playgrounds, and other places that encourage physical activity.
	Provide well-maintained bathrooms in parks and public spaces.

6.4 Tailor Design to Local Climate

	Mitigate heat through tree planting, shade structures, and water features such as fountains and splash pads.
	In colder climates, design public spaces to reduce wind exposure, maximize sunlight, and accommodate winter activities.
	Design public spaces for resilience.

7 MAKE SPACE FOR ACTIVITY

7.1 Provide Space for Programming and Events

	Make space for large and small events throughout the community—at parks, plazas, libraries, community centers, and other public spaces.
	Design flexible public spaces that can accommodate different activities throughout the course of the day or week.
	Schedule temporary street closures to provide space for new activities and events.

7.2 Support Informal Interactions

	Create and update public plazas to ensure all neighborhoods have space for congregation and interaction.
	Ensure parks and plazas can accommodate diverse, simultaneous uses.
	Create tactical streetscape renovations and parklets that provide new nodes for interaction in the public realm.
	Bring games and activities for all ages into the public sphere.

7.3 Reclaim Underutilized Infrastructure

	Clean up, rezone, and redevelop underutilized sites to create dynamic public gathering spaces.
	Leverage transportation infrastructure to create linear parks and trails.
	Enhance pedestrian and bicycle connections across large-scale infrastructure projects such as highways, railyards, and bridges.

8 FOSTER LOCAL DEMOCRACY

8.1 Improve Voting Access and Awareness

	Ensure polling locations are easily accessible to all residents.
	Use signage to enhance the visibility of polling locations.
	Hold Election Day festivals outside polling locations.

8.2 Increase Access to Community Information

	Ensure government information is easy to access and navigate.
	Provide real-time, location-specific information about government services such as transit or sanitation schedules.
	Install information boards to share details about community issues and events.

8.3 Elevate the Visibility of Local Government

	Ensure signage and messaging acknowledge the role of local government in improving and maintaining public spaces and buildings.
	Promote community meetings by increasing advertising and testing new venues.

8.4 Support Community-Driven Design Processes

	At the outset of a design project, work with community members to research and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the site.
	Stage on-site events and design activities that appeal to a diversity of participants.
	Display design concepts and elicit feedback through interactive posters, suggestion boxes, or comment boards.
	Collaborate with community members to create tactical, temporary design elements such as moveable seating, play spaces, and artwork.
	Engage community members in participatory budgeting processes that help set public space priorities.

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