

# The Coexistence Toolkit

—

Dialogue, design & policy tools for engaging  
with homelessness in public space

# How to Use This Toolkit

This document includes presentation materials and interactive exercises to guide community engagement.

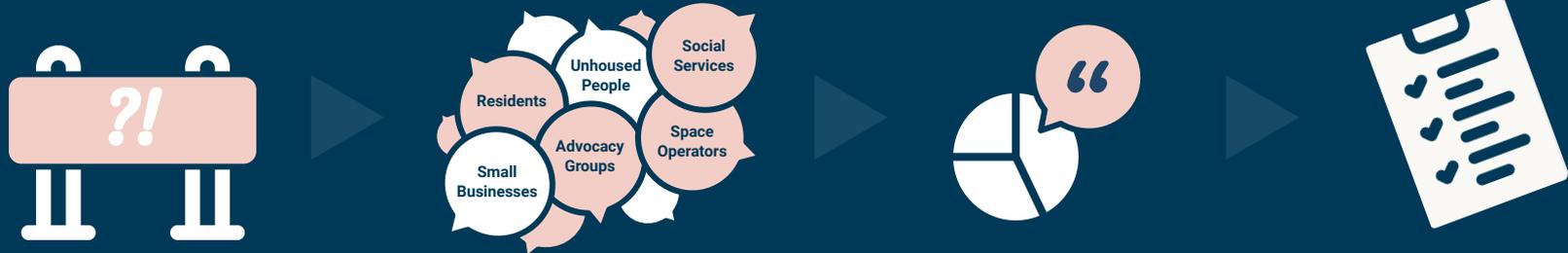
Download  
this  
document  
as a PDF  
[here](#)

Read  
SPUR's  
report on  
the toolkit  
[here](#)

## Steps for Place Managers Using This Tool:

- Reflect on whether this activity is a **standalone** set of exercises, or a part of a **larger process**.
- Consider what **site context** you might need to provide, including additional content or slides to inform your group.
- **Print out** key [worksheets](#) and interactive slides and/or **use virtual platforms** like Zoom polls or [Poll Everywhere](#)
- Use the **three core tools in succession**, ideally in **one sitting**
- Make time to **analyze your results** and reflect on how they shape policy decisions.

# When to Use This Toolkit



## ACKNOWLEDGE

You might face a roadblock that gets in the way of 'coexistence' in a project you're working on

## ENGAGE

To understand what's getting in the way, bring a diverse cross-section of people together to walk through exercises in this toolkit — perhaps through multiple sessions

## SYNTHESIZE

Review and analyze (e.g., how do men vs. women react to different behaviors?) to surface opportunities and improvements

## ACT

From there, you can develop a set of recommendations and actions to take forward

**There's a lot to take on in homelessness – we're not here to cover it all.**

WHAT THIS IS

WHAT THIS IS *NOT*

**A dialogue tool that may inform design or policy**

**A prescription or brief for public space design or policy**

**A way to address the symptoms of homelessness**

**A way to address the systemic causes of homelessness**

**From**

**Toward**

“The park will only be  
great if there are no  
homeless there”

“The park will only be  
great if we design for  
coexistence”

# Our Purpose Today

1

Reflect on our core objective: creating **just, welcoming, and healthy spaces** where diverse people can coexist.

2

Focus on what public space design and stewardship **can accomplish.**

3

Unpack what **what shapes coexistence in place** and **identify core challenges** so we can better share space with one another.

Estimated Presentation and Discussion Time: 30-60 min

# The Toolkit

# Tools

## Three tools for engaging around coexistence in public space.

### Tool 1 Values



→ You might use this tool if your stakeholder group: Struggles with fundamental alignment on priorities

### Tool 2 Behaviors



→ You might use this tool if your stakeholder group: Disagrees on how to address maintenance and public safety challenges

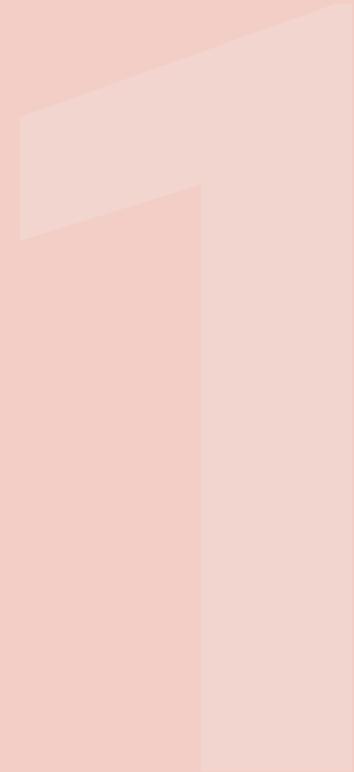
### Tool 3 Facets



→ You might use this tool if your stakeholder group: Desires clarity on roles and responsibilities

## Tool 1

# Workshopping **Values** for Coexistence in Public Space



**Q.**

**What are your core  
place values?**

**Respond to the poll based on the slides to come**

# Place Values

Do you agree or disagree?

1

---

**People and the structures they build should respect the natural environments and ecosystems they inhabit.**

4

---

**Everyone has a responsibility to fulfill the social contract — an implicit commitment to mutual protection and well-being.**

2

---

**Public space should be accessible, safe, delightful, and welcoming for all, without privileging one person or group over another.**

5

---

**The community should help define how the social contract is maintained with respect to everyone's dignity.**

3

---

**Public space should be shared among people of different backgrounds, identities, and experiences (e.g., race, ability, income).**

6

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...

# Your Take

—

What are your reflections on the values exercise?

Which resonate with you most or least? Why?

What would you add?

What would you remove?

## Tool 2

# Defining a Community Spectrum of Acceptable **Behavior**



**Q. How do different behaviors in public space make us feel?**

**People**



**Behaviors**

# We started by comparing three sets of public space rules to gauge what's 'off-limits.'



Working list of 'off-limits' behaviors and spatial conditions in public spaces



SFPL patron code of conduct — including enforcement tiers — aligned to San Francisco and State of California civil and public health codes

SAN JOSE  
**PARKS, RECREATION & NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES**

San Jose Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services' neighborhood park rules — which apply to spaces like Guadalupe River Park

# We catalogued every unique type of behavior / condition, and where it showed up.

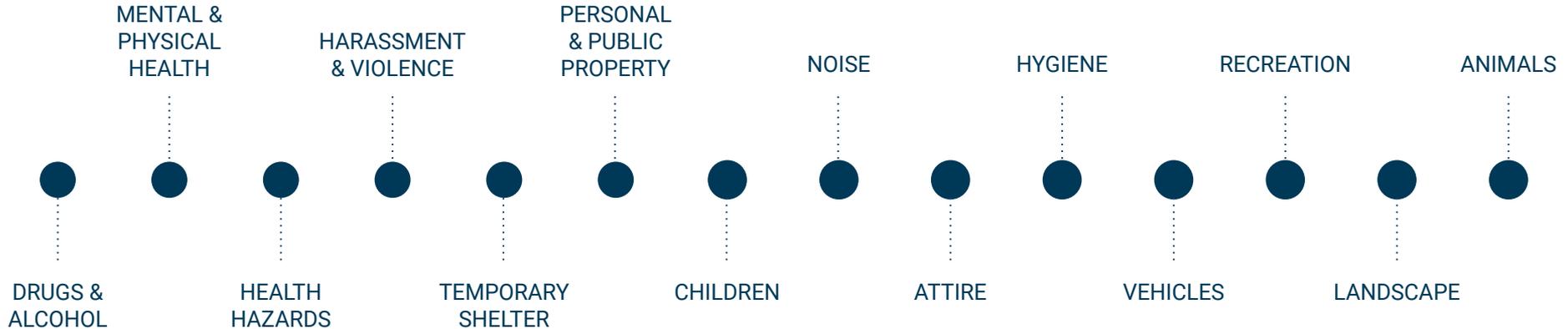
SPUR Homelessness in the Public Realm							
OFF-LIMITS BEHAVIORS		Behavioral	Spatial	OEWD	SFPL	SJPR	SFPL CONSEQUENCE
<b>DRUGS &amp; ALCOHOL</b>							
Drug use / smoking				Smoking	Using ill		1st: Warning / 2nd: 1 day
Drug use / injection					Using ill		
Exhibiting signs of being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs							1st: Warning / 2nd: 1 day
Possession and/or use of illegal drugs					Using ill		1st: 3 mos / 2nd: 6 mos
Drug dealing							
Drinking alcohol					Using ill		
Smoking / probably tobacco					Using ill		
Eating food and consuming beverages from an open container is prohibited, except in designated areas. Alcoholic be							1st: Warning / 2nd: 1 day
<b>MENTAL &amp; PHYSICAL HEALTH</b>							
Screaming / erratic							
Medical emergency							
Visibly unwell							
Appears unconscious							
Urinating					Deposit		1st: 3 mos / 2nd: 6 mos
Defecating							
<b>HEALTH HAZARD</b>							
Broken glass							
Needles							
Human and animal waste							
Blood							
Fire in progress						Outdoor	
Other biohazard							

80

behaviors and conditions!

# Behaviors enforced in codes of conduct generally fell into these categories.

## COMMON TYPES OF RULES



**Note** — For full list of 'off-limits' behaviors in each set, [visit this link](#).



**The worksheet includes  
four categories of  
behaviors and  
conditions.**

**#1**

**Property &  
Landscape**

**#2**

**Public  
Health**

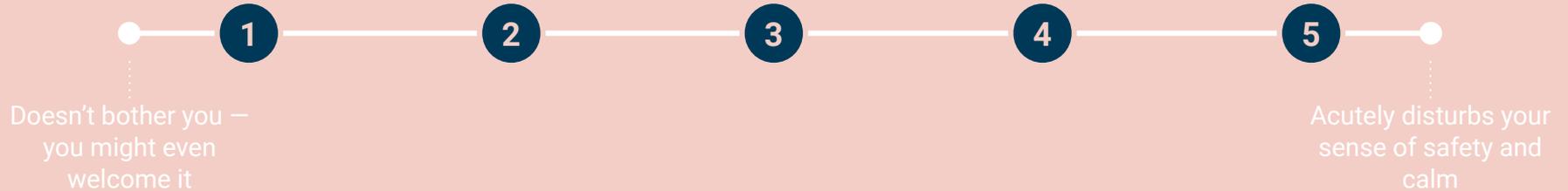
**#3**

**Drugs &  
Alcohol**

**#4**

**Harassment**

**The tool asks how each behavior or condition makes you feel on this scale.**



## Tool 3

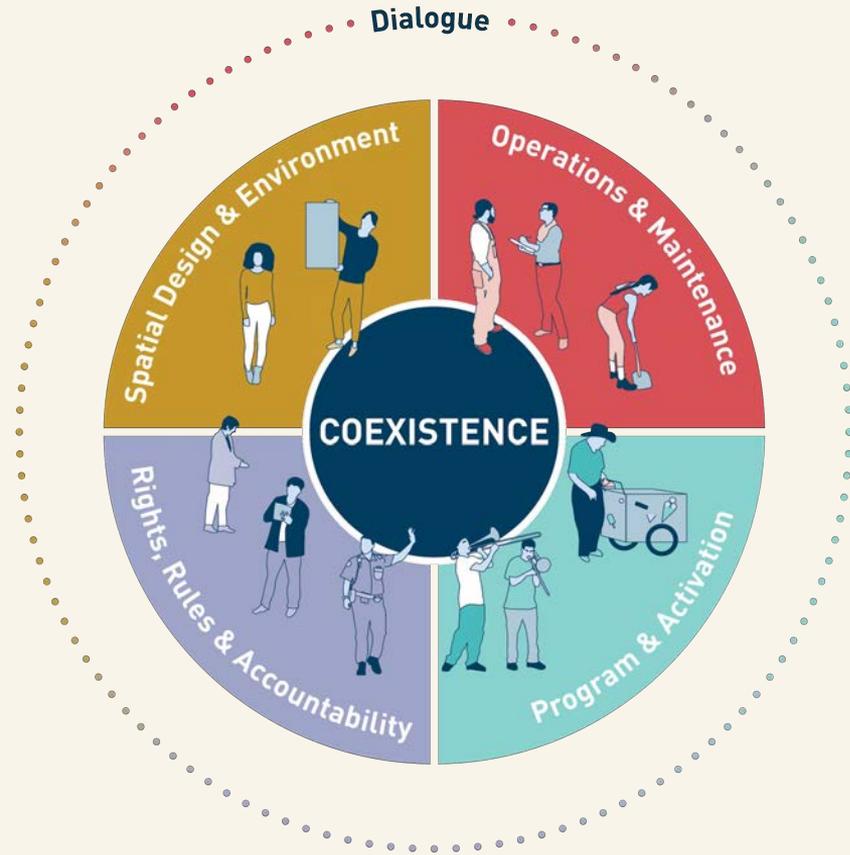
# Identifying **Facets** of Coexistence In Place



**Q.**

**How do we shape  
civic space where  
we can coexist?**

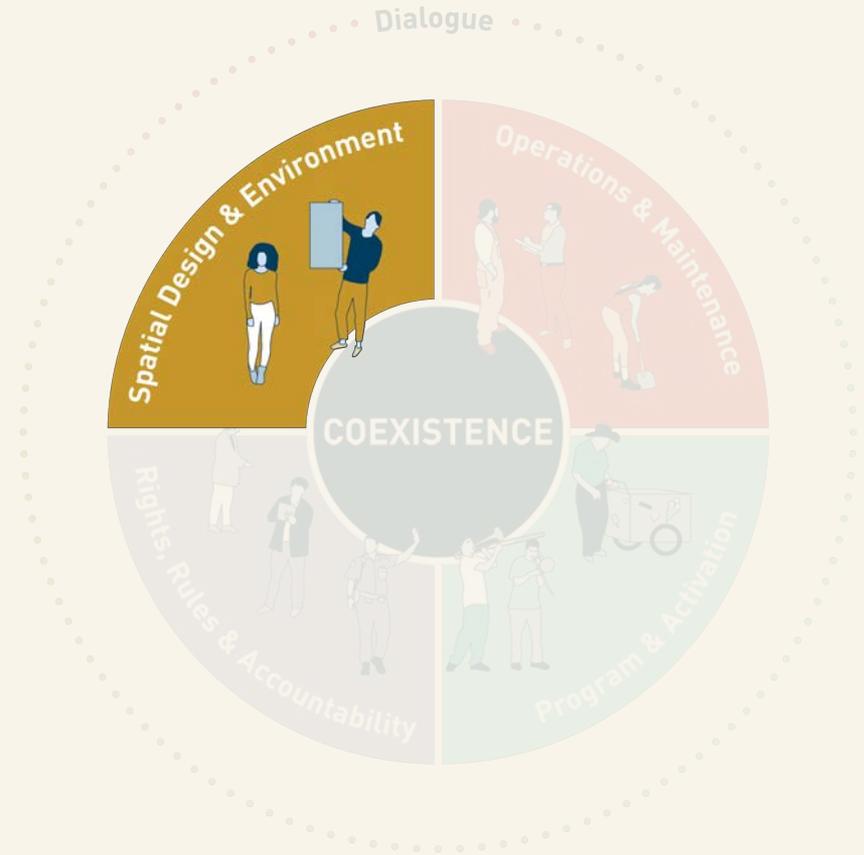
**Many different factors come together to shape and sustain coexistence in our public spaces.**



# The design and features that give shape to a place

—  
Public space design includes lighting, seating opportunities, natural features and landscaping, shading structures, and walkways.

→ Key Actors  
Designers, Planners, Environmental Advocates

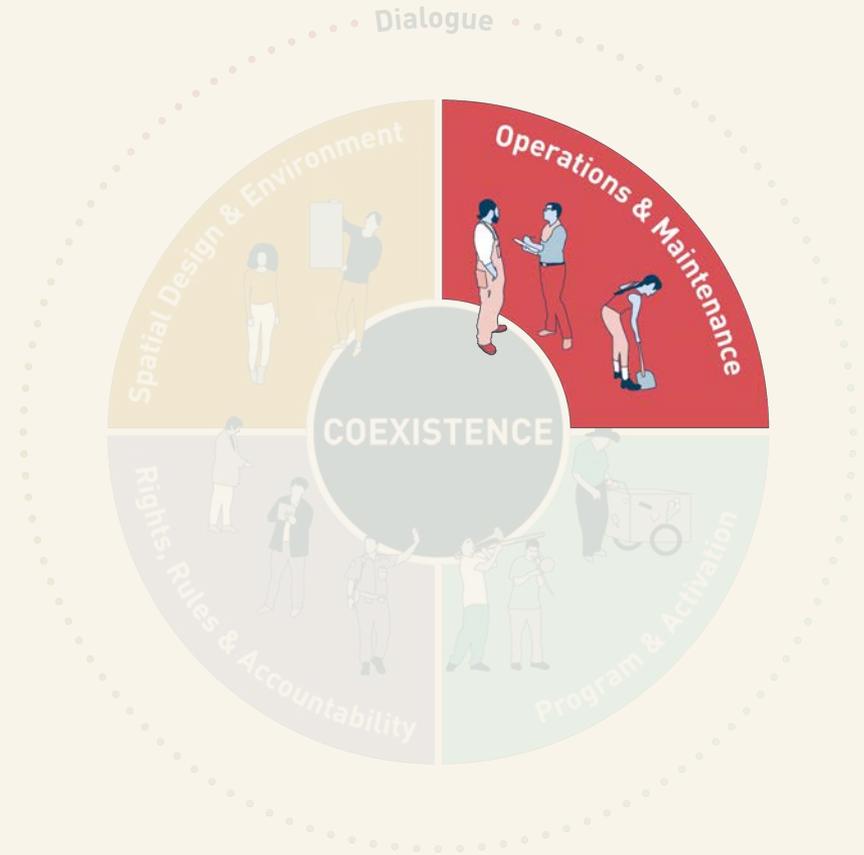


# The cleaning, oversight, and upkeep of a place

—

Operations & Maintenance includes the landscaping, waste management, and regular staffing of a public space.

→ Key Actors  
Maintenance Staff, Volunteer Groups



# The uses and activities that draw people in

—

Program & Activation includes food and beverage amenities, playscapes, artistic and cultural assets, and recreational opportunities.

→

## Key Actors

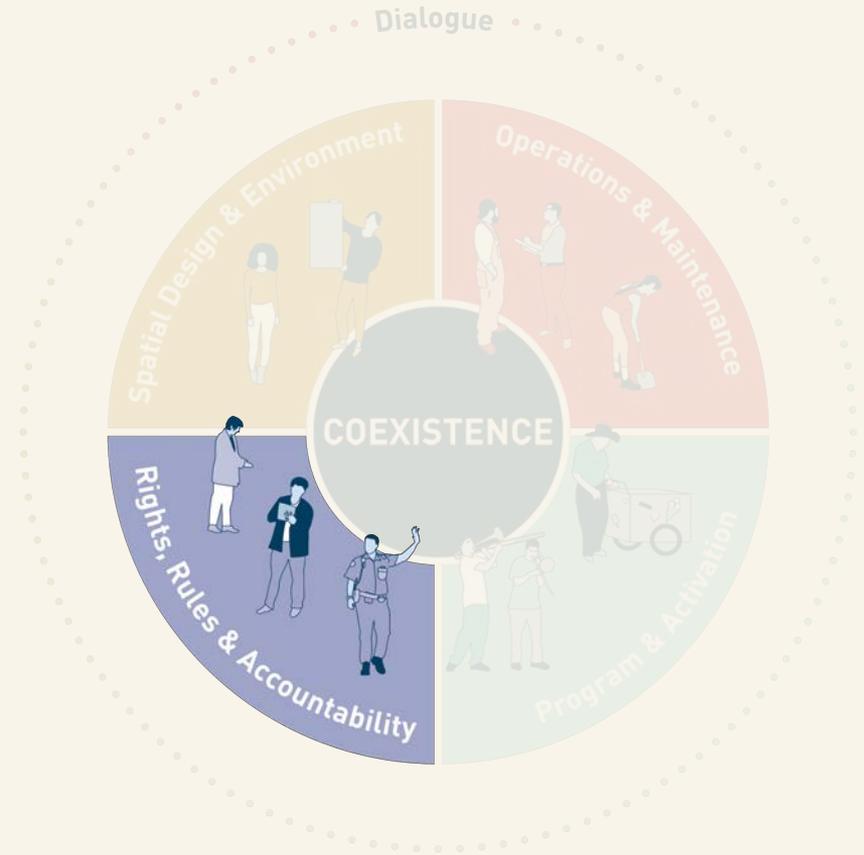
Community Organizers, Arts / Culture / Entertainment Organizations, Vendors & Small Businesses (Formal & Informal), Recreational Leagues, Adjacent Property Owners



# The standards that create a shared civic life

—  
This includes norms and systems for protecting safety, comfort, and property, such as through stewardship and social service provision.

- Key Actors  
Park Stewards, Rangers, Social Workers, Social Service Providers, Police



# The engagement processes that connect users

—  
Dialogue includes outreach and engagement processes that shape places, and sustain their maintenance over time.

- Key Actors  
City Government, Advocacy Organizations,  
Conservancies, Community-Based Organizations



# Coexistence in Your Place

—  
Share how you account for each facet of coexistence in your public space (e.g., roles, protocols, etc.)



Who is responsible for **Spatial Design & Environment?**

[Your response here]



Who is responsible for **Operations & Maintenance?**

[Your response here]



Who is responsible for **Program & Activation?**

[Your response here]



Who is responsible for **Rights, Rules & Accountability?**

[Your response here]



Who is responsible for **Dialogue?**

[Your response here]

# Appendix

**For Organizers**

# Learning From Case Studies

We drew global inspiration from a mix of cases that addressed homelessness in public space.

**Pittsburgh**  
Using a role-play card game to build empathy for the unhoused

An interdisciplinary [collaborative](#) team was tasked with looking at how to address the experience of homelessness in the built environment. They developed a journeying card game prompting players to "take the month with their resources in health, money and education. At the end of the month, each player found out if they were housed, having impacts, or if they were not. The game was included in pop-up park events, and was paired with microgrants and paid possessions of the unhoused. The studio findings were shared with the Pittsburgh Mayor and local non profits, and informed a local "70 program."



**New York City**  
Debunking myths by communicating rights and resources in an asynchronous, graphic, legible, and human way

The [Habitat for Humanity](#) creates three people's rights in homeless shelters, various programs available, paths to housing and access to other resources like transportation and storage. Not only does graphic clarity help convey complex information, but this is also an example of the importance of generous communication dialogue when communicating about homelessness. The campaign is a product of collaboration among Center for Urban Housing Safety and Justice, and the design studio 13 millibonds.



**Copenhagen**  
Inviting everyone into the process at the outset — to build trust, understand needs, and diversify usership

Located in one of the city's most diverse neighborhoods, [Lillemor Park](#) underwent a redesign that prioritized community engagement as a path to long-term ownership, and ultimately, high levels of usage. Now, the park attracts a cross-section of migrants, workers, the unhoused, and their regular use. It tracks design features that would go unmentioned to provide safe places for the homeless population — such as providing heated lighting for the sun sleep and rest comfortably without fear of theft.



**New York City**  
Inviting a variety of users through design and programming updates

In the 1980s, Bryant Park had earned the nickname "Teardrop Park." The park's design in general off-sets to attract potential users and facilitated long-term design. The park's design at each iteration close to high foot traffic has equipped them over. A redesign led by the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation — advised by William H. Whyte — included a reworking of the park, removal of obstructions like fencing and hedges, and additional amenities to ease pedestrian flow and boost visibility. But design alone didn't make Bryant Park a success. The park that now welcomes over 25,000 people daily. Annual programming earned more revenue for management to monitor and improve park conditions.



**San Francisco**  
Employing at-risk communities as responsible stewards of public space

Urban Alchemy employs people who were once unhoused, incarcerated, or who face significant barriers to employment as public stewards. In partnership with the San Francisco Office of Environment and Workplace Development, [Urban Alchemy](#) is creating a new model of public space stewardship.

Drawing from their own experiences, staff believe strongly for people experiencing homelessness, with a focus on safety and order in public spaces. The approach has been so successful that the program has been implemented in many public spaces throughout the Bay Area.



**Indianapolis**  
Putting more ethical encampment sweep practices into policy

In 2014, Indianapolis City Council passed [Resolution 10000](#) to ensure any people displaced from encampments receive support from the city. The ordinance mandates that the city:

1. **Support** — Provide financial support to help meet the needs of displaced people and their families with the goal of achieving long-term health care.
2. **Notice** — Provide 10 days notice before calling a sweep and 15 days notice before calling a sweep for the second time. A second sweep within a 30-day period could be considered.
3. **Storage** — Store personal items for up to 30 days. If items are not claimed, the items will be disposed of in a secure manner.



**Seattle**  
Designing pop-ups that provide temporary comfort, and humanize the homelessness crisis

Two Seattle designers collaborated to create pop-up [community](#) shelters in a bustling neighborhood, near a homeless services center. For people experiencing homelessness, free food, magazines, games, and music made for a timely occasion. For passersby, the public became a moment of connection and concern. The designers also provided a public space to discuss the experience of homelessness in the city.



**Atlanta**  
Trading police officers for social workers as keepers of the peace, and housing amenities that welcome all park users

In Atlanta's Woodruff Park, frequented by people experiencing homelessness, the local B&O team up with a local nonprofit to create a safe space where anyone can play board games to play — an amenity also valued by an empowerment agency that people entering the workforce, to build trust and connections to resources.



**Civic Center Public Life Plan**

Full document [here](#)





# New York City

## Debunking myths by communicating rights and resources in an asynchronous, graphic, legible, and human way

This fold-out poster breaks down people's rights in homeless shelters, various programs available, paths to housing, and access to other resources like transportation and storage. Not only does graphic clarity help convey complex information, but this is also an example of the importance of passive, asynchronous dialogue when communicating about homelessness. The pamphlet is a product of collaboration among Center for Urban Pedagogy, Safety Net Project, and the design studio 13 milliseconds.



“The guide was distributed at food pantries, libraries, and shelters throughout New York City. The Safety Net Project continues to distribute the poster at different shelters.”

CENTER FOR URBAN PEDAGOGY



How might graphic information design take shape in public space?



## Copenhagen

Inviting everyone into the process at the outset — to build trust, understand needs, and diversify usership

—

Located in one of the city's most diverse neighborhoods, [Folkets Park](#) underwent a redesign that prioritized deep community engagement as a path to building trust, ownership, and ultimately, high levels of usage. Now, the park attracts a cross-section of migrants, strollers, the unhoused, and the yuppie set. It bucks design features that would go unquestioned to provide safe places for the homeless population — such as by providing zoned lighting so they can sleep and rest comfortably without fear of theft.



“Some groups need darkness to feel safe, so we agreed on zone lighting, which lights up the path system.”

KENNETH BALFELT



# San Francisco

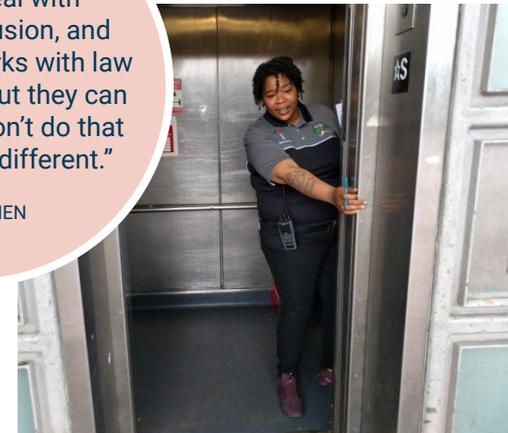
## Employing at-risk communities as responsible stewards of public space

Urban Alchemy employs people who were once unhoused, incarcerated, or who face significant barriers to employment as place stewards. In partnership with the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development, [UA deployed staff in Civic Center Commons in 2016.](#) Drawing from their own experiences, staff balance empathy for people experiencing homelessness, with a firm approach to setting behavioral norms and ensuring safety and order in public spaces. The approach has been so successful that the group now has a presence in many public spaces throughout the Bay Area.



“They have a Zen-like ability to deal with conflict, confusion, and discord. UA works with law enforcement, but they can say, ‘Hey, we don’t do that here.’ It’s very different.”

AMY COHEN  
OEWD



## Atlanta

Trading police officers for social workers and resource providers as keepers of the peace, and housing amenities that welcome all park users

In Atlanta's Woodruff Park, frequented by people experiencing homelessness, the local BID teamed up with a local nonprofit to hire a social worker who is stationed in the park each day. The park also includes a game cart, where anyone can sign out board games to play — an amenity also staffed by an employment agency for people re-entering the workforce, to build trust and connections to resources.



“There are a lot of social issues around every park. You just have to have someone dedicated to looking into them.”

JANIKA ROBINSON  
CASE MANAGER

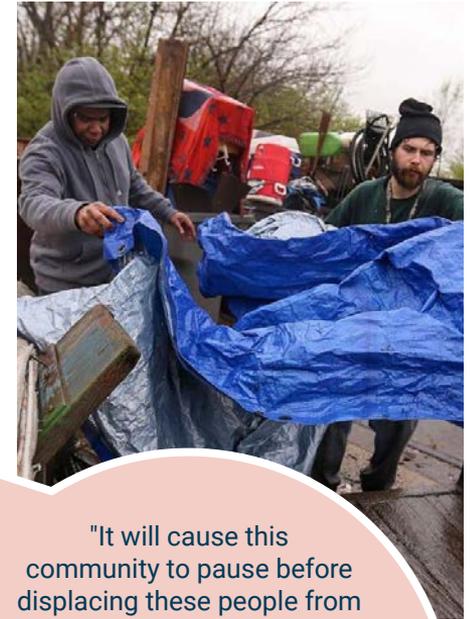


# Indianapolis

## Putting more ethical encampment sweep practices into policy

In 2016, Indianapolis City-County Council [passed landmark legislation](#) to ensure any people displaced from encampments receive support from the city. The ordinance mandates that the city:

- 1 **Services** — Designate organizations to help each person find transitional housing and other services, such as drug and alcohol rehab or mental health care
- 2 **Notice** — Provide residents with 15 days notice before closing a camp, and its nonprofit partners would have to find transitional housing before a homeless person could be removed from public property
- 3 **Storage** — Store personal items for up to 60 days in a 96-gallon container — the same size as residential trash bins, and then stored in the city's homeless engagement center.



"It will cause this community to pause before displacing these people from these camps. It will create a moment where the eyes of the community will be on all of us to ask the question, 'are we properly providing services and more importantly housing for our homeless neighbors?'"

BILL MOREAU, ATTORNEY  
AND HOMELESS ADVOCATE

# New York City

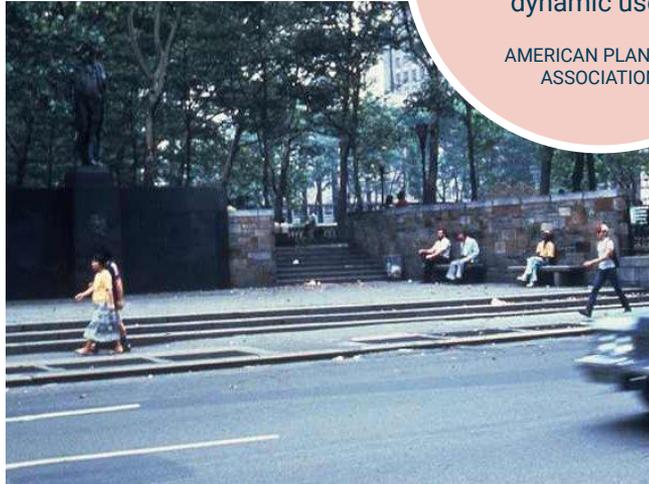
## Inviting a variety of users through design and programming updates

By the 1980s, Bryant Park had earned the nickname “Needle Park.” The park’s design — elevated off street level — deterred potential users and facilitated drug dealing and drug use, particularly at park entrances close to high foot traffic but shielded from view. A redesign led by the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation — advised by William H. Whyte — included a lowering of the park, removal of obstructions like fencing and hedges, and additional entrances to ease pedestrian flow and boost visibility. But design alone didn’t make Bryant Park a crime-free place that now welcomes over 25,000 people daily. Varied programming created more earned income for management to monitor and improve park conditions.



“The cart, which holds games, information, power outlets, and other amenities, is a moveable focal point for new, dynamic uses.”

AMERICAN PLANNING  
ASSOCIATION



## Seattle

# Designing pop-ups that provide temporary comfort, and humanize the homelessness crisis

Two Seattle designers collaborated to create pop-up “Living Room” parklets in a bustling neighborhood, near a homeless services center. For people experiencing homelessness, free food, magazines, games, and music made for a lively occasion. For passersby, the parklet became a provocative thought- and conversation-starter — building empathy about the experience of homelessness in the city.



“Right away, this parklet forced visitors to think about what their own living room means to them. Maybe that’s a space where you gather with friends, watch T.V., dance to music, or just lie on the floor.”

CITYLAB



# How can we collect data on these behaviors?

—  
Use a mix of methods to **observe public life** (e.g., stationary activity), **gauge perception** (e.g., survey), and **map conditions** (e.g., place inventory)

 [Access tools here](#)



