

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.

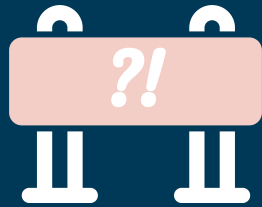
Download
this
document
as a PDF
[here](#)

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

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

WHAT THIS IS *NOT*

**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



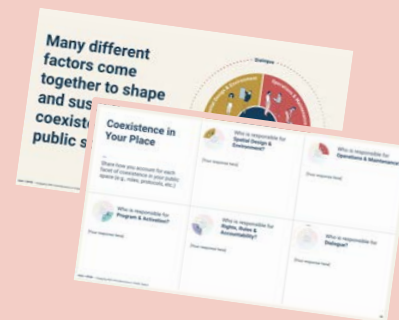
→ You might use this tool if
your stakeholder group:
Struggles with fundamental
alignment on priorities

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.

2

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

3

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

4

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

5

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

6

...

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

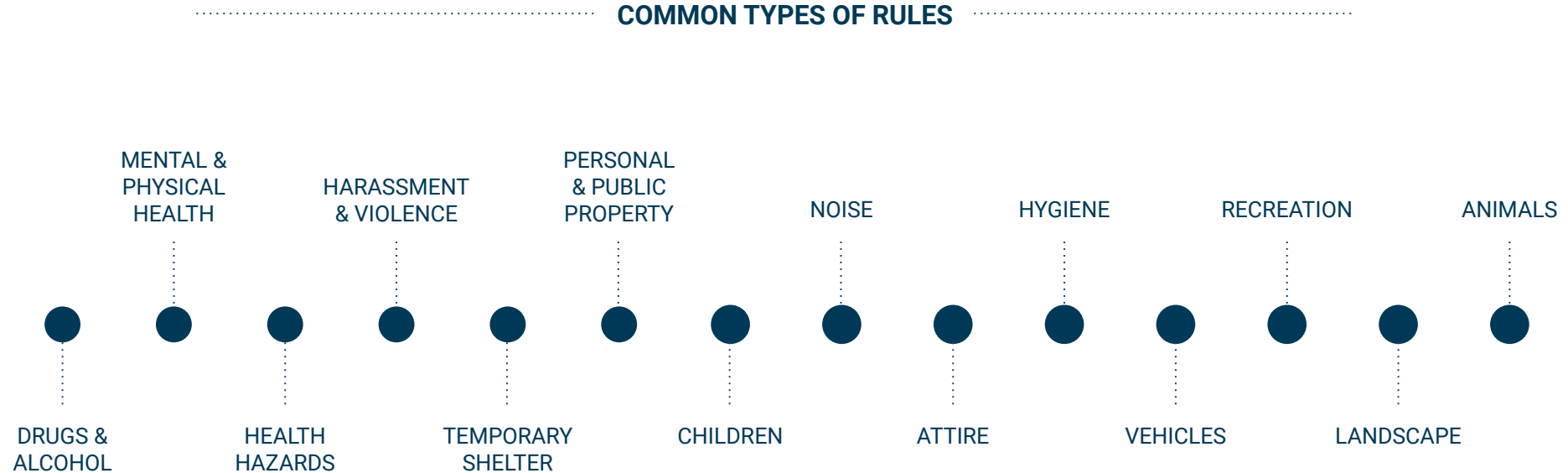
We catalogued every unique type of behavior / condition, and where it showed up.

SPUR Homelessness in the Public Realm						
OFF-LIMITS BEHAVIORS						
	Behavioral	Spatial	OEWD	SFPL	SJPR	SFPL CONSEQUENCE
DRUGS & ALCOHOL						
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
MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH						
Screaming / erratic						
Medical emergency						
Visibly unwell						
Appears unconscious						
Urinating				Deposit		1st: 3 mos / 2nd: 6 mos
Defecating						
HEALTH HAZARD						
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.



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

This worksheet asks participants to share their reactions to a set of behaviors and site conditions that often land in the gray area of a public space's social contract.

There's room for write-in behaviors that may be missing.

How does seeing these behaviors make you feel?
Rate on the scale provided, using the instructions on the back.

Category	Behavior	Scale
PROPERTY & LANDSCAPE	Dumping property (e.g., turning a vacant lot)	1-5
	Lighting fires	1-5
	Illegal fishing	1-5
	Dumping waste in the river / land	1-5
PROPERTY & LANDSCAPE	Missing restrooms (e.g., for people lined up outside)	1-5
	Informal vending	1-5
	Residing in public space (e.g., tents, beds, encampments of any kind)	1-5
	Lying on a bench or on the ground	1-5
PUBLIC HEALTH	Urinating	1-5
	Defecating	1-5
	Emitting strong, pervasive odors	1-5
	Public nudity or exposure	1-5
PUBLIC HEALTH	Unmanaged litter or belongings	1-5
	Going through the trash	1-5
	Using illicit drugs	1-5
	Dealing illicit drugs	1-5
DRUGS & ALCOHOL	Showing signs of being severely intoxicated	1-5
	Appearing unconscious	1-5
	Verbal aggression (e.g., yelling, cursing, shouting, loud ranting)	1-5
	Verbal aggression (e.g., hate speech, threats)	1-5
HARASSMENT	Physical aggression (e.g., waving a fist)	1-5
	Physical aggression (e.g., punching)	1-5
	Write-in box	1-5
	Write-in box	1-5
Write-in box	Write-in box	1-5
	Write-in box	1-5
	Write-in box	1-5
	Write-in box	1-5

Write-in box: In public space, for the and why you add, rate how much it disturbs your sense of safety and calm.

 [Access PDF here](#)

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

#1

**Property &
Landscape**

#2

**Public
Health**

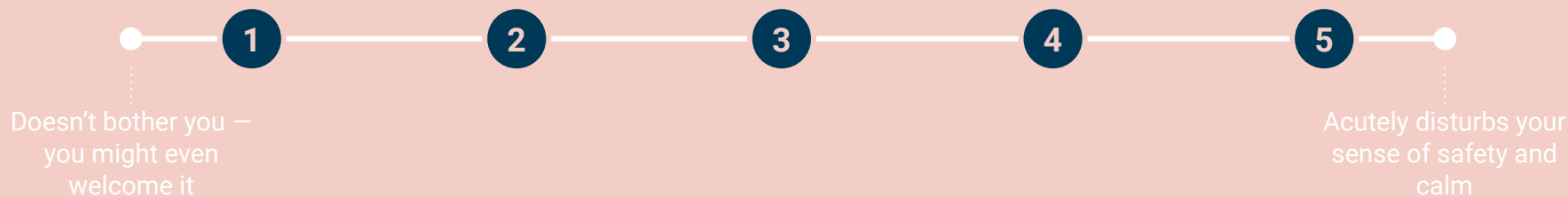
#3

**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

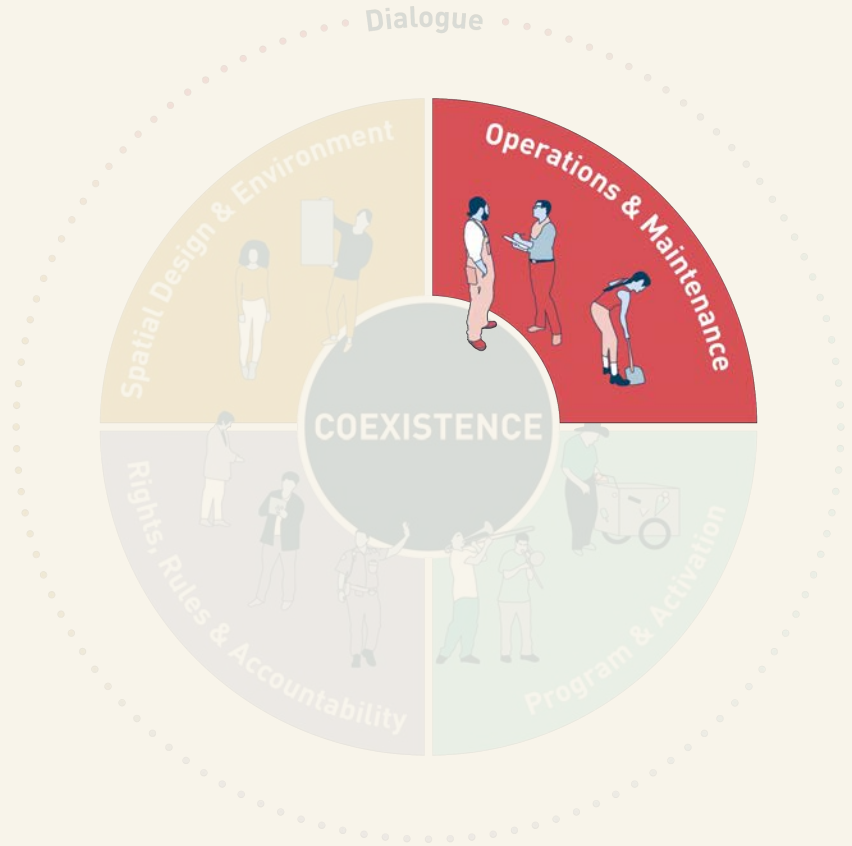
—

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.)



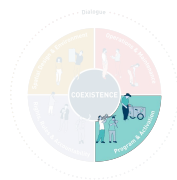
Who is responsible for
**Spatial Design &
Environment?**

[Your response here]



Who is responsible for
Operations & Maintenance?

[Your response here]



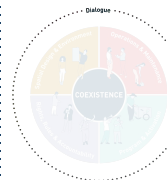
Who is responsible for
Program & Activation?

[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

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

Two Seattle designers collaborated to create pop-up [“couchbook”](#) parklets in a bustling neighborhood, where a homeless services center is located. For people experiencing homelessness, free food, magazines, games, and music made for a lively occasion. For passersby, the park became a provocative thought-provoker and conversation starter — building empathy about the experience of homelessness in the city.

[illegible]

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 BPD 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 Atlanta ally staffed by an employment agency for people re-entering the workforce. To build trust and connections to resources,

[illegible]

Civic Center Public Life Plan



Full document [here](#)



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

An interdisciplinary Carnegie Mellon studio was tasked with sparking dialogue around the experience of homelessness. To build empathy, students developed a journeying card game prompting players to “survive the month” with limited resources in health, money, and relationships. At the end of the sequence, each player found out if they were housed, housing insecure, or homeless based on the resource cards they had left. The game was included in pop-up park events, and was paired with micro-exhibits profiling prized possessions of the unhoused. The studio’s findings were shared with the Pittsburgh Mayor and local non-profits, and informed a local TV program.



“The goal of the gameplay was to spark conversations around the difficult decisions that have to be made by people in precarity, and ‘deep processing’ of those situations by the players.”

MICHAEL ARNOLD MAGES,
PROFESSOR



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?

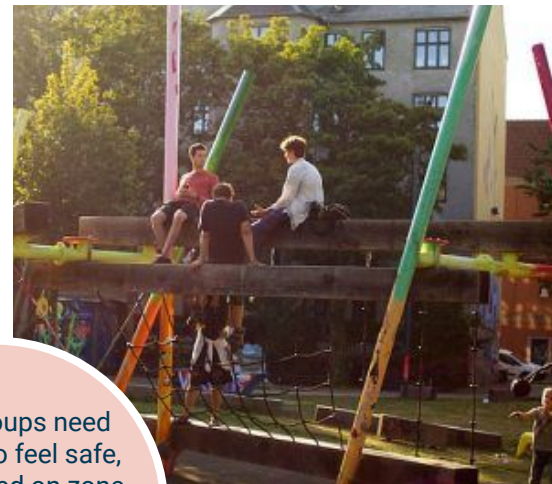


Copenhagen

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

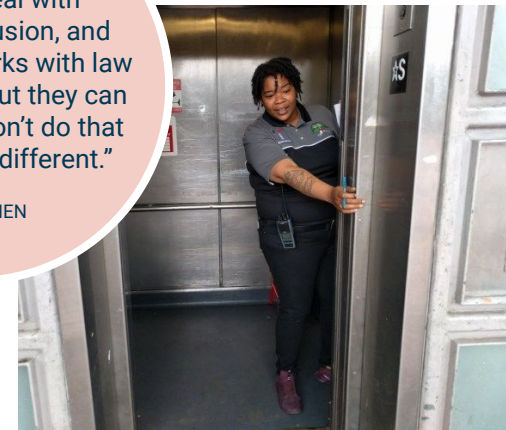
Employing at-risk communities as responsible stewards of public space

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

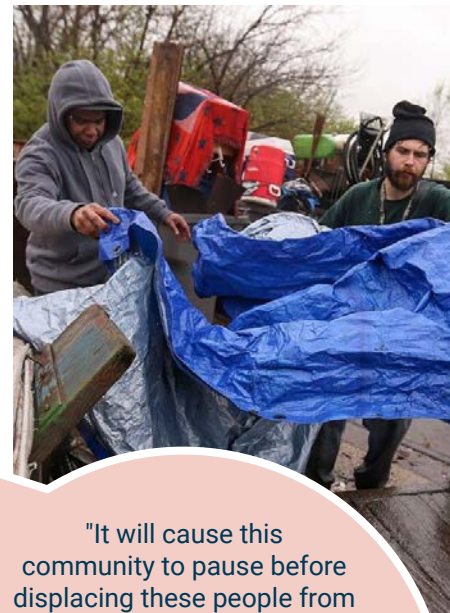


Indianapolis

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

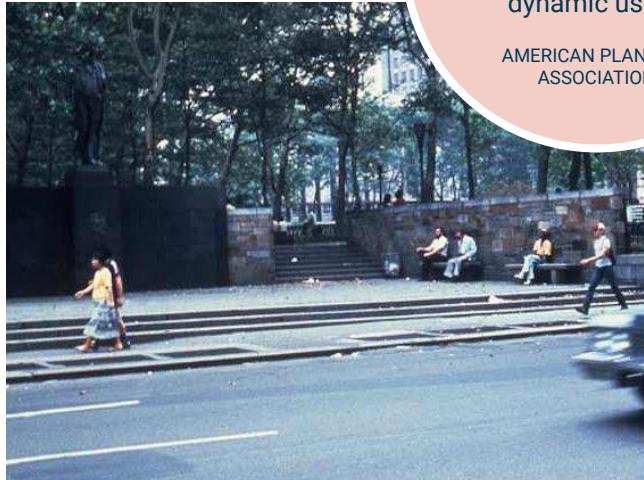
Inviting a variety of users through design and programming updates

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](#)



