



**INSPIRED LEADERS
SHAPING CITIES**

Activating Public Spaces

A 2016 TOP ISSUES COUNCIL EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Geared towards urban place managers who are intentionally programming public spaces into activated and engaging amenities for their communities, this in-depth guidebook uses real world examples that dive into the various regulatory, design, funding, programming, and maintenance issues for both temporary and permanent placemaking initiatives.

TAKEAWAY 1

Activating Public Spaces

A thriving downtown is one that attracts people of all ages, races, identities, abilities, and backgrounds. These places thrive for a number of different reasons, but similarly, they all create a critical mass of activity that supports retail and restaurants, fosters healthy social settings, provides a feeling of safety and security, and encourages people to live and work in a downtown with extensive amenities. Public spaces are often the stage on which these dynamic results can be best realized and where urban district management organizations can play a significant role. These places become authentic anchors, offering a unique sense of place and memorable experiences for visitors.

TAKEAWAY 2

Developing the Initiative

While public space activation may come with its challenges, the investment will result in enhancing the district as a destination, piquing the interests of guests and encouraging visitors to actively engage with the place.

To generate a vibrant public space, a thoughtful and strategic plan to successfully “program” the space needs to be considered. This can be done through physical interventions, such as urban form and scale, landscaping and access to design features. This guidebook discusses these efforts, which include, but are not limited to :

- Activation and arts
- Accessibility for all
- Comfort and safety
- Community collaboration
- Context-sensitive design
- Execution
- Food and beverage
- Image and usability
- Insurance
- Maintenance and operations
- Measuring success
- Partnerships and defined roles
- Personnel costs
- Programming and events
- Regulatory agencies
- Security
- Social interaction
- Sense of place
- Sustainable funding streams
- Supplies and storage
- Urban form and scale
- Vision for use and activity

TAKEAWAY 3

Placemaking

Public spaces are activated through either permanent or temporary placemaking measures. The control and maintenance of great public spaces requires a collective vision and active community collaboration, as built environments alone are not enough to garner a sense of place or a sense of civic pride. This guidebook notes that placemaking efforts are often distinguished between those designed to be permanent in nature versus those intended to be temporary in form. This inclusive scope recognizes that downtown stakeholders can utilize diverse placemaking tools ranging from permanent public art installations to temporary pop-up parklets to activate their public spaces. Due to the diverse nature of placemaking initiatives, stakeholders can utilize an array of tools, such as:

- Permanent public art installations
- Temporary pop-up parklets
- Temporary murals
- Fitness classes
- Street and sidewalk décor

TAKEAWAY 4

Challenges

This guidebook identifies fundamental challenges and offers innovative solutions to urban place managers undertaking placemaking efforts to activate, develop and maintain public spaces. Temporary and permanent placemaking initiatives may be complex to understand and difficult to accomplish, especially with tight budgets,

limited resources, numerous stakeholders and community goals. This guidebook looks at the physical, social and cultural aspects of these projects and offers practical case studies that address the challenges around the design, maintenance, funding, and regulation for both permanent and temporary placemaking projects:

- Permanent placemaking regulatory, design, funding, and maintenance issues
- Temporary placemaking regulatory, design, funding, and maintenance issues

SUMMARY

Successfully implementing a creative placemaking program is a multi-faceted effort. While the fun part is the final result, success means carefully addressing key issues such as regulations, legalities, design, maintenance and funding. This is important because, as budgets are tightened and incentives limited, public space activation represents a cost-effective way to improve the user-experience for those that live, work, visit and play in urban districts. From temporary pop-up parks to more permanent public art installations, creative placemaking and public space activation should be a key ingredient in the recipe for successful revitalization.