



Westlake Park & Occidental Square

An Innovative Public-Nonprofit Partnership Model
to Activate Downtown Seattle's
Most Visible Public Spaces

2016 IDA Downtown Achievement Awards Submission for Public Spaces

Downtown Seattle Association & Partners



SEATTLE PARKS FOUNDATION



For the past three years, Seattle has ranked as one of the top-five fastest growing cities in the country. As Seattle's population increases and its urban core becomes increasingly dense, so does the need for vibrant and inviting public spaces. Downtown-area parks have unique challenges and opportunities that occur as a result of being situated in fast-growing urban settings with rising employment and residential populations. In order to meet that growing need, beginning in June 2015, the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) – in partnership with Alliance for Pioneer Square, Friends of Waterfront Seattle and the Seattle Parks Foundation – began an innovative partnership with the City of Seattle by signing a one-year pilot contract to manage and program two of Downtown Seattle's most visible, and underutilized, public spaces - Westlake and Occidental Parks.

The DSA has long taken an active interest in promoting the health and vibrancy of Downtown's public spaces. The City of Seattle was also interested in exploring new models for managing and activating Downtown's public spaces, and began discussions with DSA and its partners to take on a greater leadership role. While used elsewhere around the country, Seattle did not have history of public-nonprofit partnerships around parks and public spaces.

The park enhancement strategy was based on the model championed by Biederman Redevelopment Ventures (BRV), who designed a plan for Occidental Park in 2013. From this work, the DSA and its partners devised a strategy to transform these underutilized spaces into vibrant spaces. The strategy involved leveraging public dollars for additional private investment which would go into regular daily programming, games, children's programming, park staffing, overnight security, purchasing new amenities and park beautification efforts, such as new planters and rotating art installations.

Through this new partnership, DSA set out to accomplish several goals:

- Increase the overall number of park visitors;
- Seek a more even balance between men and women park visitors;
- Improve the overall attractiveness of the parks;
- Reduce the amount of observed illegal activity occurring in the parks;
- Establish sustainable financial model to support park activation efforts;
- Provide outreach and support to park visitors in need; and
- Explore the benefits that a community approach to park activation and management can offer.

These desired outcomes strengthen the partnership, attracted new community partners, and focused activation efforts. The parks were to be vibrant, attractive public spaces that everyone could enjoy. The first-year results have been fantastic. The DSA and partners have helped redefine these public spaces into community destinations for all to enjoy, which offers an important preview for how to make future Downtown parks into vibrant destinations.

After only one year, this innovative park activation effort has achieved some remarkable results.

Initial Park Activation Results

	Goal 1: Increase in Observed Park Visitors	Data indicate that between June 2015 and April 2016, ambassadors observed nearly 400,000 park visitors, a significant increase compared to 2014.
	Goal 2: Improve Gender Balance	Results indicate that there is a greater balance of men and women in the parks than prior to park activation efforts. In 2015, the parks regularly achieved an equal balance of men and women.
	Goal 3: Improve Park Attractiveness	In 2015, DSA and partners made a significant investment in new park furniture and planters. A survey of park users found that in Summer 2015, 82 percent found the parks to clean and welcoming.

	Goal 4: Reduce Amount of Observed Illegal Activity	Overall, observed illegal activities have significantly declined, particularly smoking and public drinking. This can be attributed to a combination of park ambassadors educating visitors on the rules and increased enforcement.
	Goal 5: Establish a Sustainable Financial Model	Every \$1 of Seattle Parks & Recreation (SPR) funding generated an additional \$9.25 in private funding – providing a smart, efficient leveraging of SPR dollars. Every dollar raised in Westlake and Occidental Parks is reinvested in park activation.
	Goal 6: Provide Outreach and Support Services to Park Visitors in Need	Since July 2015, the Outreach team made 73 outreach contacts in the parks and was able to provide ongoing engagement, case management assistance, supplies, as well as connect some individuals in need to temporary housing.
	Goal 7: Explore Benefits of Public-Nonprofit Partnership Model	Following the success of the one-year pilot, DSA and the City are in discussions for a 5-year park management agreement. Additionally, the City of Seattle is expanding this community management model to five other Downtown parks.

The collaboration between organizations and city departments is a ground-breaking step for Seattle. Upon identifying the need, the DSA stepped in with an innovative solution to help manage the parks and turn them around, making them vibrant spaces for all.

Today, the success in Westlake Park and Occidental Square is being replicated across the city. The DSA is collaborating with neighborhood groups on pilot programs in other Downtown parks and public spaces. There is a clear movement in the city to activate spaces for all to enjoy, and the DSA is proud to be a leader in this effort.

A crucial element of successful activation is to make to these spaces inclusive and welcoming for all. By providing free programming for all audiences, engaging a variety of community partners and providing outreach on multiple levels, the DSA has proven this to be an effective approach to success.

The public-nonprofit partnership model is changing the landscape of Seattle’s Downtown parks and public spaces. Positive parks and public spaces are good for all. The continued success helps to create and foster strong community partners, both public and private, to provide financial support to make these efforts sustainable into the future.

Innovation	Replication	Representation	Sustainability
✓ Ground breaking partnership and unique funding and outreach model for the City of Seattle.	✓ Activation and funding model now being used at 5 other Seattle parks with plans for further expansion.	✓ Strong emphasis on inclusion. The parks are for everyone. Provide outreach to individuals in need.	✓ Partnership leveraged significant private dollars to support ongoing activation efforts.

The DSA and its partners have helped redefine these public spaces into community destinations for all to enjoy, which offers an important preview for how to make future Downtown parks into vibrant destinations. After a successful one-year pilot contract with the City of Seattle, the DSA was selected to continue activation efforts and is currently in contract negotiations to make this a reality. This further demonstrates how strong public-nonprofit partnerships can generate change and have a great impact on our cities. Staffing, security, beautiful new furnishings and plantings, family-friendly games, food trucks, outreach to those individuals in need, and an array of free community programs have made these parks safe and welcoming spaces for all to enjoy.