



March 2021

## What is the ‘Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life’ (Evaluation Tool)?

The Evaluation Tool is a four-page resource that helps evaluate the quality of public space and public life. It can also document changes in a public space over time as a ‘before and after’ snapshot. You can use it in digital or printed form in English, Arabic, Simplified Chinese and Vietnamese versions. The tool will assist you to identify a public space’s positive attributes and areas for improvement and inform place planning, project scoping and briefs or grant applications.

The final Evaluation Tool asks questions across four themes:

- **Am I able to get there?** Consider the site’s location. Can you easily find your way to the public space through a network of paths, streets, public transport and signage? Are people of all ages and abilities able to move around the space?
- **Am I able to play and participate?** Consider the social or cultural activities available. Are there opportunities to play alone or with others, and does the place promote physical activity or learning?
- **Am I able to stay?** Consider safety, facilities and the natural and built environment. Do the design and amenities ensure a diverse range of people can comfortably stay in the public space? Do they have the facilities they need?
- **Am I able to connect?** Consider the public life in the place. Does the public space feel welcoming, inclusive, and diverse? Are there opportunities for social interaction or evidence of community stewardship?

After considering these themes, you can then identify where the place is doing well and where there are areas for improvement.

## How does the Evaluation Tool relate to other government programs for improving public spaces?

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the department) oversees the [Premier’s Priority of Greener Public Spaces](#) (the Priority), which aims to increase the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes’ walk of quality green, open and public space by 10% by 2023.

As part of our work to deliver the Priority, the department is creating a Great Public Spaces Toolkit. The toolkit will include methods to evaluate the quality of public space, guides, case studies and



exemplars. The Evaluation Tool is the first resource released in the toolkit. The toolkit also supports the draft NSW Public Spaces Charter by helping to bring the principles to life.

### Who is the Evaluation Tool intended for?

The department created the Evaluation Tool for use by anyone who wants to better understand their public spaces, no matter their technical expertise or background. The Evaluation Tool can be used by local and state government, industry, including designers, planners, placemakers, and project managers, as well as the community more broadly. The Evaluation Tool can be used as a standalone evaluation resource or as part of a broader project evaluation framework to complement more technical assessments.

### What types of public spaces can the Evaluation Tool be used to assess?

The Evaluation Tool can be used to evaluate any public space. Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all free and without a profit motive. They include:

- **Open spaces:** active and passive, including parks, gardens, playgrounds, public beaches, riverbanks and waterfronts, outdoor playing fields and courts and publicly accessible bushland
- **Public facilities:** public libraries, museums, galleries, civic/community centres, showgrounds and indoor public sports facilities
- **Streets:** streets, avenues and boulevards, squares and plazas, pavements, passages and lanes and bicycle paths.

### Why is the Evaluation Tool being developed?

The Evaluation Tool is being developed to support government agencies, industry and the community to create better quality public spaces. The Evaluation Tool was developed in response to requests from industry, local and state governments for a free, easy method to evaluate the quality of public space. It provides a standardised approach that can be used to help build the case for quality improvements in public spaces. The Evaluation Tool is not intended to replace technical analysis of public space but to complement an evaluation process and build understanding.

### How do I complete a site evaluation using the Evaluation Tool?

The department recommends using the Evaluation Tool to document public spaces throughout project lifecycles: before, during, and after. For example, before a project commences it may be useful to conduct evaluations at various times during the day, days of the week, and in varying weather conditions.

The needs of the project should shape the number of times you complete the tool. A benefit of capturing the before and after is to help provide evidence for your project and your evaluation of quality improvements over time. A mid-point evaluation is also valuable, as it can show the progression of the project or inform the need for adaptations. This helps build an evidence base.



### How do people carry out evaluations and how long does the process take?

Each evaluation will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. The time may vary because of the size and type of public space you are evaluating. The tool is four pages long and includes a guide for its use. The Evaluation Tool is not an interception survey or an interview with a community member. Complete the evaluation from your own observations. It is not intended to be used to survey people within the public space but can be provided to the community to record their perceptions.

### What do I do with evaluations I have carried out using the Evaluation Tool?

The evaluation results are for the use of the project team and are not collected by the department. We recommend gathering the results and creating a summary report. From the analysed results identify and prioritise where quality improvements are required in the project.

### What happens to the information collected through the Evaluation Tool?

The information collected remains the property of the individual, group, organisation or agency that collects the data for their use in identifying strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improving local public space. The department does not collect the results of any evaluations undertaken.

### What are the benefits of using the Evaluation Tool?

The range of benefits in utilising the Evaluation Tool include:

- gathering evidence for public space performance
- providing a consistent method to collect data over time for public space projects
- taking a human-centred, citizen-led approach to the evaluation of public space
- simplifying the evaluation process to recognise positive attributes and areas for improvement
- informing future planning, design and investment, helping to build the case for long-term change.

### What consultation has occurred to date on the Evaluation Tool?

The Evaluation Tool has been developed by the department, working closely with local government and government agencies, with high-level industry input. The Evaluation Tool was on public exhibition for community comment in 2020. A summary of community feedback and suggestion for the final Evaluation Tool has been created and will be published on the Premier's Priority Great Public Spaces webpage. Key consultation activities to date included:

1. **Council consultation, 2019 – 2020**

Since 2019, the department has been working closely with six councils to deliver Places to Love - Public Space Demonstration Projects. The six councils are Blacktown City Council,



Burwood Council, City of Sydney, Liverpool City Council, Penrith City Council, and regional representative, Wagga Wagga City Council. The Department trialled the draft Evaluation Tool with these six councils and incorporate their feedback.

### 2. **Peer review**

Peer review by our international peers Gehl, PlacemakingX and Project for Public Spaces, recognised globally for their expertise in public space design and assessment. Gehl has a similar tool called the 12 Quality Criteria worksheet structured around three main themes: protection, comfort and enjoyment. Project for Public Spaces has a similar tool called the Place Game structured around four themes: users and activities, comfort and image, access and linkages, and sociability.

### 3. **Public exhibition**

The public exhibition began on 20 October 2020 and closed on 17 November 2020. During this period community feedback was collected, reviewed and incorporated into the final Evaluation Tool.

## How do I provide feedback on the Evaluation Tool?

The public exhibition began on 20 October 2020 and closed on 17 November 2020 on the draft Evaluation Tool. The department encourages you to try the Evaluation Tool for yourself. Please download the final tool, for [print version](#) or [digital version](#) and use it to assess a park, street, plaza or other public space in your local community. To provide feedback on the final Evaluation Tool email the team at [publicspace@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:publicspace@planning.nsw.gov.au)

## How does the Evaluation Tool respond to COVID-19?

COVID-19 has shown us, more than ever, the importance of having quality public space close to where we live to encourage our physical, mental and social well-being. The Evaluation Tool is intended to give local and state government, industry, and the community, a free and easy-to-use method to review the quality of their public spaces. This in turn can help strengthen interventions in response to COVID-19 in public spaces, helping to identify where improvements could help maximise people's enjoyment of our open spaces.

## How can I find out more?

For more information about the Evaluation Tool, email the team at [publicspace@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:publicspace@planning.nsw.gov.au)

To find out more about the Premier's Priority and the projects the team is working on, visit <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces>

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