

What is the NSW Public Spaces Charter?

The NSW Government has made a commitment to increasing access to quality green and public space by 2023 across urban areas in NSW, through its priority for Greener Public Spaces. The NSW Public Spaces Charter is a key project in supporting the achievement of the priority for communities across NSW.

The Charter identifies 10 principles for quality public space, developed through evidence-based research and discussions with a diverse range of public space experts and closely aligned to the UN Charter of Public Space. These principles are intended to support all those who are engaged with, provide advice on, make decisions about, or undertake planning, design, management and activation of public spaces in NSW.

We will be inviting NSW Government agencies, local government, industry and other organisations and groups who plan, design, manage and activate public space across NSW to sign up to the Charter and join us in becoming signatories.

What public spaces does the Charter apply to?

Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all free and without a profit motive. They include:

- Public 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.

Who is the Charter for?

The community and community organisations can use the 10 principles to understand the value and benefits of quality public space. The Charter will help the community to participate in the conversation about how public spaces should be planned, designed, managed and activated.

Public space managers can use the 10 principles to inform plans of management and the policies and programming that respond to the needs of their users. Strategic and statutory planners can apply the 10 principles as they develop planning proposals, local planning instruments and plans for precincts, local government areas, districts or regions. Public policy makers can incorporate the 10 principles within policy and advice that informs the NSW Government.

Local businesses and chambers of commerce can use the 10 principles to better understand how they can complement and advocate for public spaces in their area. Development professionals such as architects, heritage specialists and arborists can use the 10 principles to help inform the design process and delivery of a public space. Industry bodies can use the 10 principles to inform and support members involved in the planning, design, delivery, management, activation or evaluation of public space. Developers can draw from the 10 principles in how they plan for and provide quality public spaces within their developments.

Why has the department developed the Charter?

The NSW Government developed the Charter to support everyone in NSW to have access to high-quality public space that allows them to enjoy and participate in public life. COVID has shown us how important it is to have access to public space.

The NSW Government has made a commitment to increasing access to quality green and public space by 2023 across urban areas in NSW, through its priority for Greener Public Spaces. It is delivering on this commitment through strategies, policies, plans, programs and systems change that are delivered across the whole-of-government. It is also working closely with local councils, who are critical custodians of public space, to improve access to public space. The Charter has been developed to provide a unifying set of principles that can support any organisation working in public space.

How do I use the Charter?

The Charter's principles are premised on the understanding that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to public space. Every public space has its own unique history, heritage, context and is supporting the different needs and uses of a specific community. There are significant and important differences in landscape, climate, amenity, population density and social and cultural demographics across Greater Sydney and regional and rural New South Wales.

All these factors influence where and how people use public space and what the priorities are for their community. There are no set rules as to where and how the Charter applies –it could apply to the management of a national or regional scale parkland, just as it could to the design of a new pocket park. A practitioner's guide will be released in 2022 that will provide more information and ideas about how the 10 Charter principles can be applied when planning, designing, managing and activating public space.

Why should my organisation become a signatory to the Charter?

By becoming a signatory to the Charter an organisation will be demonstrating a commitment to delivering great public spaces outcomes for everyone. Signatories will be provided with the NSW Public Spaces Charter icon to demonstrate their commitment to public space and will have their own logo promoted on the Charter's website.

Throughout 2022 signatories to the Charter will be supported with advice from the NSW Public Spaces Charter project team on how to develop an action plan to implement the Charter in their organisation or practice. Signatories will also have access to a community of practice focused on building the capacity of signatories to apply the Charter, by connecting them to public space experts and providing opportunities for information and data sharing and for promoting their own public space projects or practice.

How can my organisation become a signatory to the Charter?

You can make an application to become a signatory to the Charter, on the Charter's website at <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/public-space-charter>

If you would like more information about becoming a signatory, you can email us at PublicSpace@planning.nsw.gov.au

What is the process to becoming a signatory?

The steps to becoming and being a signatory are:

1. **Application** – prospective signatory completes the signatory form on the Charter webpage.
2. **Review** – the application is received and reviewed by the Cities Revitalisation and Place team utilising the eligibility criteria.
3. **Notify** – The Cities Revitalisation and Place team send the prospective signatory a notification of the outcome of their application.
 - 3(a) **Issue** - those that are eligible will receive a partner's pack (see Implementation Plan).
 - 3(b) **Promote** – the signatories' logo is added to the Charter website to confirm they are a signatory. Signatories are encouraged to share that they are signatories to the Charter with their stakeholders and networks.
4. **Engage** – Signatories attend and participate in a community of practice
5. **Report** – Signatories report on their actions as a signatory including the outcomes and findings within 6 months of becoming a signatory.

What is the Eligibility Criteria to become a signatory?

Tier	Criteria	Benefits
A - Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is a legally constituted government or non-government organisation located or working within NSW (the Charter must be signed by a legal entity); and Has a direct role in the planning, development, design, management or activation of public space in NSW as part of its core business, or regular undertakes work that directly influences public space outcomes in NSW 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in Community of Practice Organisational acknowledgement on the TfNSW website
B - Supporter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is a legally constituted government or non-government organisation located outside NSW (the Charter must be signed by a legal entity); and/or Has a direct role in the planning, development, design, management or activation of public space as part of its core business, or regular undertakes work that directly influences public space outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in Community of Practice Organisational acknowledgement on the TfNSW website
Not Eligible	Individuals.	

The NSW Government acknowledges the goodwill of those participants signing up to the Charter, however the NSW Government reserves the right to remove or exclude participants from involvement in the Charter at any time.

The NSW Government does not have any responsibility for ensuring that participants uphold the principles and outcomes of the Charter, or the manner in which participants choose to deliver upon these principles and outcomes. To the fullest extent permitted by law, NSW Government disclaims any liability that may arise out of a participant signing or delivering upon the principles and outcomes in the Charter.

Can I use the Charter if I'm not a signatory?

Yes, the Charter has been developed for anyone involved in the planning, design, delivery or management of public space, even if they are not signatories. We encourage eligible organisations to become a signatory to the Charter as this will demonstrate a commitment to quality public space and to using the principles.

How will I know who has signed up to the Charter?

The Charter's website will acknowledge organisations that have signed up to the Charter. Signatories to the Charter will be notified that they have signed up.

Why is the Charter voluntary?

The Charter has been developed to be used by a wide range of stakeholders, from across all levels of government, industry and the cultural and community sectors. The Charter's principles have been deliberately developed so as not to have any binding policy or resourcing impacts on signatories to provide them with the flexibility to apply the principles to their own context, including existing policy settings. The Charter acknowledges that the NSW Government already delivers great public space outcomes through policy and strategic frameworks that span across the whole-of-government and the principles have been developed to align with and refer to these where necessary.

How long does this Charter remain in place?

The Charter has been designed for a long-term impact and the principles do not have an expiry date, but the program will be reviewed in 2023. While the Department does not intend to subject the Charter to regular review, we may update it as required to reflect contemporary practice and emerging research.

How will the success of the Charter be measured?

The Charter program will be evaluated as part of the evaluation of the government priority for Greener Public Spaces. The Charter program specifically seeks to engage and influence stakeholders responsible for the planning, delivery, management, evaluation and activation of public space. The evaluation program for the Charter is in development and may include the number of signatories, number of strategies that now have public space embedded as a priority, and the positive outcomes signatories have been able to achieve.

How will signatories be supported to evaluate their own involvement with the Charter?

Signatories will be asked to provide feedback to the Department every six months on their progress implementing the Charter. The purpose of this is for the Department to gain an understanding of how the Charter is being implemented, challenges and the outcomes. The reports will be used to help inform our understanding of public space and will not be shared beyond the Public Spaces team, unless we have gained your permission.

A template for the report will be provided to signatories.

Questions may include:

- Over the past six months on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all to 5 being very, how effective do you think your organisation has implemented the Charter principles?
- Over the past six months on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being extremely easy and 5 being extremely difficult, how challenging has it been to implement the Charter in your organisation's activities?

How does the Charter align with other key policies and strategies?

Through consultation with policy experts across the broader NSW Government during the Charter's development, it aligns with, draws on and refers to other key NSW policies and strategies that support green, public and open space.

By reinforcing the importance of high-quality design within the Charter, we have aligned it with the Government Architect NSW's (GANSW) Better Placed design policy (2017), Greener Places green infrastructure design framework (2020) and Connecting with Country draft framework (2020) The Greater Sydney Parkland's 50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands (2021) is also a key document the Charter aligns with. Ensuring alignment of the Charter with future strategies and policies supporting public space will be an ongoing activity during its implementation.

How was the Charter developed?

The Charter principles have been developed through:

- Preliminary research undertaken into Australian and international literature and research about public space and best practice planning, delivery and management approaches.
- Expert interviews with ten Australian and international experts in a range of fields of public space practice and knowledge, including economists, public health researchers, urban geographers, and transport planners.
- Public exhibition and consultation seeking feedback on the draft principles from the community and also from NSW Government agencies, councils, and industry about what support they would need to become signatories to the Charter. A full summary of the engagement and feedback can be found [here](#).
- Peer review including detailed feedback on both the Charter and practitioners guide from over 20 subject matter experts.

What is quality public space?

Quality makes people feel safe, welcome and included. The quality of a public space is reflected not only in its physical form—how it's designed, maintained and integrated with its environment—but also through the activities it supports and the meaning it holds. It can be evaluated by asking:

- Am I able to get there?
- Am I able to play and participate?
- Am I able to stay?
- Am I able to connect?

In addition to the Charter, the department has developed an Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life (2021), which has a series of questions to analyse the quality of public space. Anyone who wants to better understand the strengths of a public space and its areas for improvement can use this tool. The tool draws on research and globally renowned methodologies by Gehl and Project for Public Spaces, amongst others.

How was the community consulted on the Charter?

The Charter has been developed to reflect the community's expectations and aspirations for public space, as well as the needs of organisations and practitioners who will use it.

Between 20 October 2020 and 1 December 2020, the draft NSW Public Spaces Charter was placed on public exhibition to get feedback on the principles and how they could be applied.

Over 190 individuals and organisations provided feedback on the draft Charter through seven workshops, the online survey, digital engagement hub and online/email submissions. This included representatives from NSW government agencies, local councils, non-government organisations, community, environmental and recreational groups.

During this time a targeted program of engagement was also undertaken with Aboriginal Knowledge Holders and communities to seek their feedback on the Charter. A full summary of the engagement and feedback can be found [here](#).

For more information, the NSW Public Spaces Charter Engagement Report is available to read here: https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/390179/NSW-Public-Spaces-Charter-Engagement-Report.pdf

How was feedback on the Charter responded to?

Feedback from the public exhibition was reviewed and incorporated into the NSW Public Spaces Charter through a range of mechanisms, including the introduction of over-arching values for the Charter and refinement of the language and framing of the principles.