Great public spaces guide
Ideas and opportunities

Public spaces are our open spaces, public facilities and streets. They are publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free. Public spaces are the heart of our communities. This guide outlines an approach to place and seeks to help communities, industry, councils and state government take action in creating great public spaces.

What creates a great public space? Great public spaces have a unique combination of the following elements:

**Place**
Places are spaces that people have made meaningful. A place is more than its geographic location. It is a unique combination of physical form, the activities that occur there and the sense of place attachment: that is, how people feel about the place. Great places provide diverse opportunities for social interactions, have a strong character, and are welcoming, inclusive and beautiful.

**Creating a sense of place**
Urban environments require thoughtful planning, design and management to ensure places have character and people at their heart. Well-planned and well-designed buildings, infrastructure and public spaces play an important role in positively influencing local identity and providing a stage for our public lives. Place management and programming are also key to activating public spaces and need to be considered early in design.

**Public life**
Public life is the social activity that occurs in public space – the interactions between neighbours, family, friends and the broader community create delight and make life more meaningful. It is in our public spaces that we can connect 365 days a year. Public spaces support our happiness, health and wellbeing, environmental resilience, and prosperous local economies.

Evaluating the quality of public space

The four questions that follow can help us evaluate the quality of public space and public life. They can also help identify whether a place is doing well and areas for improvement.
Great public facilities
Ideas and opportunities

Public facilities include public libraries, museums, galleries, civic and community centres, showgrounds and indoor public sports facilities. As social infrastructure, these public spaces contribute to community identity, inclusion and cohesion. Access to high-quality and free services has a direct impact on the social and economic wellbeing of citizens.

Ideen and opportunities to help create great public facilities include:

**Am I able to get there?**
- People of all abilities have access to facilities
- Connected and accessible by walking, cycling and public transport
- Clear signage and centrally located wayfinding
- Located in the heart of neighbourhoods
- Extended opening hours

**Am I able to play and participate?**
- Magnets for information and ideas exchange
- Diverse artistic and cultural activities
- Facilities for diverse education programs
- Opportunities for events, exhibitions and sporting activities
- Open, playful, creative or peaceful spaces

**Am I able to stay?**
- Welcoming, inclusive, safe, like community ‘living rooms’
- Wi-fi and computer access
- Equitable access to educational services and materials
- A place to gather and interact, or for individual pursuits
- Collaborate, work or study
- Access to community spaces

**Am I able to connect?**
- Community participation online and in-person
- A positive and joyful environment
- Discover local, historic and contemporary cultural stories
- Participate in activities and networks
- Share knowledge and skills

Illustration by Gregory Baldwin. Images courtesy of Destination NSW
Quality open spaces make for liveable and healthy neighbourhoods. Public open spaces include parks, gardens, play spaces, beaches, riverbanks, waterfronts, publicly accessible bushland and outdoor sports fields and courts. They provide us with places to exercise, play, rest, participate in social activities, and contribute to healthy, happy and resilient communities.

Ideas and opportunities to help create great open spaces include:

**Am I able to get there?**
- People can easily access and move through the place
- A short walk from homes and places of work
- Multiple entry points
- Near public transport
- People can access by walking or riding a bike
- Equitable and accessible footpath network

**Am I able to play and participate?**
- Diversity of activities
- Play spaces for all ages
- People of all ages and abilities have spaces to exercise or relax
- Event spaces and facilities
- Places for community groups and clubs
- Sport and recreational facilities for health and wellbeing

**Am I able to stay?**
- Comfortable places to sit in the sun or shade
- Landscaped with trees and plants
- Feels safe day and night
- Well-maintained and clean
- Places protected from the wind, sun and rain
- Visually attractive and well-designed

**Am I able to connect?**
- Promotes positive social interactions
- Inspires community stewardship
- Places for social gathering, with opportunities for socialising and celebrating
- Vibrant and welcoming
- Public art, heritage and local character

Illustration by Gregory Baldwin. Images courtesy of Destination NSW
Great streets, avenues, boulevards, squares and plazas, pavements, passages, galleries and bicycle paths are our towns’ and cities’ connectors. In our urban areas, they provide places where people can walk, ride a bike, socialise and add vitality to neighbourhoods, creating better places to live. Vibrant streets generate positive social, economic, cultural, and environmental outcomes.

Ideas and opportunities to help create great streets include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Am I able to get there?</th>
<th>Am I able to play and participate?</th>
<th>Am I able to stay?</th>
<th>Am I able to connect?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate traffic levels and speeds</td>
<td>Other public spaces along the street</td>
<td>Space for business customers to wait or dine outdoors</td>
<td>Vibrant public art, greenery and colourful flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport choice</td>
<td>Play streets and shared zones</td>
<td>Shady, green and leafy</td>
<td>Interesting things to see at eye level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide footpaths and equitable access</td>
<td>Interactive activities and place infrastructure</td>
<td>Safe and well-lit</td>
<td>Places of meaning and diverse public life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy crossing points with tactile indicators</td>
<td>Places to relax and rest</td>
<td>Setbacks for local street character</td>
<td>10+ things to see, do and connect with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced obstructions and clutter</td>
<td>Regular programming, events and things to do</td>
<td>Quality materials</td>
<td>Evidence of community volunteerism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear wayfinding</td>
<td>Contribute to the night-time economy</td>
<td>Variety of businesses and services nearby</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Illustration by Gregory Baldwin. Images courtesy of Destination NSW