

PPS Initiative

Placemaking for Local Leaders

As leaders around the world search for new and better planning and design solutions for their communities, Placemaking is emerging as a strong alternative to “business as usual.” The stumbling global economy, a vulnerable energy supply, and loss of confidence in far-flung markets have resulted in an upsurge of interest in things local: producing local food; promoting local businesses; preserving local character and traditions; protecting local open space and public places; and finding meaningful ways to belong to a local community.

To meet these challenges, government leaders and their partners are revisiting their strategies for economic development, master planning, and how they involve communities in their planning efforts. Whether inside or outside government, leaders can introduce new ideas, convince others and help usher in Placemaking demonstration projects that turn ideas into a reality.

The Value of Placemaking

Great cities, towns and neighborhoods are known by the communities and the public places that define them. A vibrant system of plazas, parks, markets, boulevards, and streets – which makes up the ground floor experience of a city – generates local economic, cultural, social and leisure activities. These places are often sacred to a citizenry, enriching people’s lives and bringing them together. To tourists, the culture, character and identity of a city is transmitted through these special places.

Placemaking is a process that allows people in a community to develop a vision for a place themselves. Governments cannot do placemaking. Design firms cannot do placemaking, and engineering firms cannot do placemaking either. Only people can.

Beyond its value in creating more vital cities, Placemaking offers powerful, cost-effective, and simple solutions to critical global issues. Placemaking:

- Supports economic development for local business enterprises, both urban and rural;
- Creates, nurtures and enhances communities’ unique places, in contrast to our increasingly homogenized metropolitan areas;
- Promotes active, healthy lifestyles in attractive, comfortable, and accessible public spaces, i.e., local markets providing fresh, nutritious foods;
- Fosters meaningful and frequent contact between diverse populations in public spaces where all feel welcome, increasingly critical as cities everywhere become more diverse and multi-cultural;
- Enhances environmental sustainability, providing viable alternatives to fuel-consuming, pollution-generating car-dependent communities by making them more walkable and bikeable with attractive, welcoming and connected community destinations.

How local leaders can partner with PPS

Placemaking is most effective when it is used to help a community create an agenda that puts the idea of place ahead of the individual agendas of any particular profession or discipline, whether it is transportation, economic development, public works or any other. Elected officials, agency heads, and community organizations and foundations can all benefit from learning how to apply the principles and practices of Placemaking in their work. Placemaking can also become the catalyst for a new type of collaboration among stakeholders around a common purpose for improving the health, sustainability, livability and economy of any community.

1. **Placemaking Leadership Training.** For decision-makers at the local, county and statewide levels who want to shift their agencies, staffs, consultants, and communities toward a more integrated way of planning, PPS can work with leaders to develop a training program both for the leadership in the city and for others who need to participate to make the effort successful. This helps to not only introduce the concept of Placemaking to a variety of different professions but will also help insure that a Placemaking approach is integrated into a city’s regular planning process. The following are key topics covered in Placemaking Leadership Training:
 - “The Power of 10” - an easy way to engage a broad citizenry quickly around placemaking. By asking people to identify the best, worst and most promising public spaces in their neighborhood, city and region, a community can quickly develop an agenda around the transformation of these key destinations. The goal is to identify at least 10 places and to rate them according to the opportunities to participate in activities in each.

- *Transportation* - Transportation and transit professionals, mayors and local officials, historic preservation and downtown advocates and managers can all benefit from incorporating a place-based approach into transportation projects
- *Place Management* – exploration of how existing public spaces can be revitalized through management and programming, often saving millions of dollars in unnecessary design and construction expenditures
- *Planning and Urban Design* – an integrated way for planners and designers to achieve better outcomes that create the great, livable cities that people want to live in
- *Community Facilitation* – simple tools for public involvement that make meetings more positive, effective, and supportive of a partnership approach to planning and implementing projects
- *City Assessments* – how to evaluate a downtown’s strengths and weaknesses, and how to identify the best opportunities for making changes that will have the biggest impact in making that city more livable

2. Demonstration Projects. In order for leaders to demonstrate how a placemaking approach can impact a city, a series of small demonstration projects should be undertaken. These changes can be made to public spaces of all kinds - parks, plazas, streets, public buildings, markets, and transit facilities. These types of projects encourage new models for collaborations between communities and city agencies and also showcase what a good place is.

- Demonstration projects show visible results that create excitement, momentum and commitment to a Placemaking approach. PPS can provide a range of levels of technical assistance – from “SWOT” team assistance, in which a short intervention can help to support innovative projects and programs at the local community level, to longer term Placemaking planning and design projects.

3. Building and supporting a local campaign. PPS can help support a local network of leaders, citizens and institutional partners who wish to work together to build a better vision for their places and streets. These networks facilitate broader public participation and communication through events, web sites, blogs, and hand-on projects. PPS can facilitate the branding of a campaign by providing written content and images for local websites, and framing your message for local communications and outreach.

- *Training of neighborhood groups.* Training can equip citizens, community organizations, elected officials, and professionals with the knowledge they need to effectively work together, which can lead to a communal effort of creating great places.
- *Community-initiated public space evaluations.* PPS is developing more web-based evaluation tools so that communities can rank and rate streets and public spaces in their communities, and brainstorm short and long term strategies to improve them.
- *Local Forums.* PPS can help leaders to plan a local event, whether it be a public forum, city council meeting, or business luncheon, to facilitate policy discussions and to create broad partnerships of organizations supporting the campaign.
- *Planning Tools.* PPS has developed a range of planning tools that communities can use to continue their work over the long term. These include a placemaking handbook, community facilitation and visioning tools, urban design methodologies, an RFP process that results in more vibrant projects, guidelines for more effective transportation planning and development review guidelines among other resources.