



Reclaim Public Space

A Guide for Relocalizing our Communities

The Relocalization Network

Reclaim Public Space • synopsis and roles

Synopsis

Relocalization needs public space: if community members don't have places where they can interact, it can be very difficult for them to form relationships, share resources, and organize to determine their community's future.

Work with other members of your community to revitalize an existing public space or to create a new site for neighborhood interaction. Each community will have a different vision of how to develop such a project and how the finished product will look, function and be managed. Project ideas include reclaiming an underused parking lot for public space, converting a street intersection into public space, or reclaiming a vacant or abandoned lot for a community garden.

Roles

Core Committee	Oversees the project, conducts research, and forms the backbone of the initiative
Community	Includes those who live, work, visit or participate in institutions in or near the area in question
Municipal Government	Employees of the municipal government or city council who can offer guidance, support, and information concerning current laws and regulations
Community Representatives	Represent various groups within the community. These representatives may include block representatives, business owners, and representatives from schools or places of worship.
Work Party Volunteers	Build, landscape and administer the new or newly revitalized public space

Time Frame

6 months to 1 year

Tools

List of possible locations to revitalize

Data collection capabilities

Plans and blueprints to present to the community, city officials, and other interested parties

Building and landscaping supplies

Advertising materials to promote community forums and parties



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Reclaim Public Space • project outline

Project Outline

Preparation

1. Form a core committee of individuals who will initiate the project and oversee its completion.
2. Research possible locations for a new community space; make note of the negative qualities, positive qualities, and possible opportunities and constraints at each location for reclaiming it as public space.
3. Come up with short, preliminary ideas for how each of these locations could be revitalized as public space. Using this information, choose the location with the most potential.

Develop Community Support

4. Gauge the level of interest for these projects in the neighborhood. Talk to the people who live and/or work next to each site, the owners of nearby shops and businesses, and representatives from nearby institutions such as schools and places of worship.
5. If there is sufficient interest in pursuing a project on any of the sites you are considering, hold a community forum. Invite local residents as well as community representatives, and discuss why there is interest in the project(s), and what the project(s) would accomplish. Discuss how other communities and cities have conducted similar projects, and the ways in which they have benefited as a result.

Establish a Project Group and Vision

6. If there is sufficient interest and support from your community forum to pursue a project, identify the individuals who are interested and establish yourselves as an informal project group. Collect contact information and set up a mailing list or phone tree.
7. Convene the project group and develop a plan for moving forward. Develop a rough vision statement to ensure that the group stays on an agreed path. Establish roles, needs, objectives and a rough timeline.
8. Depending on the location of the space, the size of the project and the interest of the community, it may be advisable to hold a community-wide visioning session for the project to ensure that you have sufficient community support for its eventual implementation.

Research Government Regulations

9. Once you have a vision for the project and have established a degree of community support, contact your local government and find out what laws and regulations apply to your project. Many public space reclamation projects are initially refused because they do not fit with current laws and regulations. If this happens to you, find an elected official or staff member who supports the idea of your project and will help you find ways to make it happen. Be prepared to coherently describe the project, its vision, its community support and its benefits.



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Develop the Project Design and Plans

10. In your project group or a community workshop, discuss how the space could be revitalized and what should be included in the project. Residents should be encouraged to consider what they want the space to look like, how it should run, what should be there and how it should be managed. Preliminary ideas could include gardens, community bulletin boards, murals, mini-cafes, new businesses, sports facilities, playgrounds, or places to sit and relax.
12. Hold a neighborhood gathering or party in the location so community members can get a feel for what it is like to be together in the space. Holding a party in the location will also help fuel continued interest in the project.
13. Organize the ideas and recommendations into a Project Concept document, which includes the design, estimated costs, skills and people needed, a management plan and remaining constraints. Refine the document as needed by meeting with all interested parties and stakeholder. Discuss the project's implementation in depth. As stakeholders agree to the plan, ask them to write letters of support and include it with the Concept document
15. Once your project group and any necessary stakeholders have agreed on the Project Concept, including a final design, it's time to turn it into a Project Plan. This Plan should the project vision, goals, and rationale, as well as an implementation plan with an estimated budget, roles and responsibilities for community members, needed tools and a schedule.

Implementation

15. Present the Project Plan to your local government for approval and permission. Once permission has been granted, organize volunteer work parties to implement the project. These work parties will be sources of community building and interaction, so everyone in the community, especially children, should be encouraged to participate.
17. When the project has been built, hold a neighborhood party at the new location and celebrate the revitalized community space.
18. Implement the management plan to ensure that the space remains safe, clean and respectable.

Resources

Project for Public Space: www.pps.org

The City Repair Project: www.cityrepair.org

Pomegranate Center: www.pomegranate.org



Photo Credit: David Sund (front cover / back cover)



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Get Involved

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