MEASURING PUBLIC SPACE
A toolkit for exploring Public Space
INTRODUCTION
The Public Space Toolkit provides planners, organizers, and regular people tools to test and analyze public spaces. +Studio created The Toolkit as a resource to help people and organizations get a fresh perspective on the public spaces in their communities.

The Toolkit contains methods and examples for surveys, activity scans, bicycle and pedestrian counts, and other ideas for engaging the public and gathering information. Combined, these tools can provide a straightforward method for gathering data and measuring public spaces. We hope you will adapt our material to help you with your project. We also understand that while these are useful tools, they are not the only tools. Use this book and other reliable resources to determine what is best for you.
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One of the best ways to learn about a place is to go out into the field and talk to the people you find there. An intercept survey is a structured method for hearing what people think. Out in the streets you can reach people who might not otherwise participate in more structured studies or engagement activities. You can also collect demographic information with intercept surveys. Information about who uses public spaces is scarce. In most cases, you have to collect it yourself. A randomly administered survey with a large enough sample size will give you some idea of the types of people that you find in a space.
WHEN SHOULD I CONDUCT AN INTERCEPT SURVEY?

You can conduct your survey at any time of day and on any day of the week. The most productive time to do an intercept survey is when people are passing through or using a space. For some locations, weather may play a factor, and for others, weekday versus weekend can influence the flow of people. Keep the survey quick and easy. A simple survey allows you to reach more people in more places.

PROCEDURE

1. **Approach people in the Space** The survey location and the activities that go on there will determine the best method to approach people. On a busy route with lots of passersby, you might ask every other person who walks past you to take the survey. In an area where people are hanging out, talk to those people. They might have a lot to say. Be aware of any biases that might influence who you ask to take your survey. Who you ask about a place should represent all the different people you find there.

2. **Ask people to take the Survey** Say you are a public space researcher and ask if they would like to take an anonymous 3-minute survey for your project. Asking strangers for their time can be stressful, but after you polish your pitch and get used to approaching people, you might enjoy it.

3. **Conduct the Survey** Ask the questions or give the surveyee a form to fill out. Let them decide which method they would prefer. Both styles have advantages. Talking through a survey can be fun and people sometimes share more information. Have a notebook ready - your conversation may evolve into an impromptu interview. Some prefer to fill out forms themselves, especially for sensitive demographic questions.

SUPPLIES

- Pens
- Clipboards
- Survey Forms
- Snacks
- Drinks
- Manila Envelopes
Thank you for taking the time to complete this brief survey! The following questions are meant to better understand your perception and experience of public spaces in Lloyd. Your responses will be confidential.

These questions are about the place where you are now.


What is your primary (choose 1) reason for being in Lloyd?

○ Shopping
○ I’m staying in a hotel in the area
○ I work in the area
○ Just passing through
○ Entertainment
○ Dining
○ Resident
○ Sightseeing
○ Hanging out
○ Other: _______________________

For your most recent trip to Lloyd, what type of transportation did you use?

○ Walk
○ Streetcar
○ Drive
○ Bus
○ Bike
○ Other: _______________________
○ MAX

Do you think that This place is...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean and well maintained</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place where you enjoy spending time</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place where you would meet a friend</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place where it is easy to talk to people you don’t know</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do you like most about this place?

Please tell us any idea that you have to make this place better.

A Public Space is any place open to everyone to use. For example, parks, streets, and plazas are public spaces.

Do you have a favorite public space (in any city that you have lived or visited)? Briefly, describe the place, where it is, and what you like about it.

What is your racial identity? ________________

What is your gender identity? ________________

What is your age? ________________

If you have any additional comments about public space in Lloyd, let us know in the space below.

Thank you for completing the survey! Please, enter our drawing for a $20 gift card for one of the next Lloyd businesses: J Cafe, Green Zebra, Lloyd Center, Milo’s City Cafe and Lloyd Farmer’s Market. Write your name an email address to enter to win. We will contact you if your name is drawn. Your contact information and survey responses will remain anonymous. Thanks again for your participation.

Name: _______________________

Email address: _______________________

[Image]
Stay Organized Once you finish the survey, slip it into a manila envelope to ensure that the responses remain anonymous and organized.

Be prepared for Groups Keep several pens and clipboards handy. You might encounter groups of people who all have things to say. If you have enough supplies, this is an opportunity to get extra responses.

Take Notes Bring a field notebook and take note of all the interesting things you encounter while surveying. Surveying is an opportunity to spend time in a place and make observations. Bring a camera.

Keep Going Keep asking people to take your survey. Expect to get 5 to 10 responses an hour. Don’t forget to take care of yourself. Conducting intercept surveys can consume a lot of your time and energy. Take breaks to think about how surveying is going and eat snacks.

Get Permission Some public spaces are not truly public, as they are privately owned and managed, so get permission from the property owner first. If you are denied access, a safe right-of-way (e.g. a sidewalk) can serve as a reasonable alternative.
BICYCLIST AND PEDESTRIAN COUNTS

Bicycle and pedestrian counts are a way to better understand the potential of a public space by measuring its bicycle and pedestrian traffic. Simple and straightforward, a bicycle and pedestrian count can provide useful quantitative data about the accessibility and connectedness of a public space.
WHEN SHOULD I COUNT?

You can do bicycle and pedestrian counts anytime during daytime hours, but should try to count during the times of days when a certain space, or the areas next to the space, experience the most foot and bicycle traffic. Streets are usually busiest from noon until early evening, but this depends on where you are, and some places may be busiest during the morning commute time of roughly 7:00 to 9:00 am. We recommend counting at least during one weekday and one weekend day.

PROCEDURE

1. Decide on Your Screen Line Create an imaginary line that people have to cross in order for you to count them. If you are working with more than one person, make sure you both know where the line is. Setting a screen line will prevent miscounts and avoid confusion during periods of heavy foot and bicycle traffic.

2. Find Your Spot Situate yourself in a way that provides a good vantage point to see people crossing from multiple directions. Standing still for hours can be tiresome, so find a bench, or bring a foldable chair to stay comfortable.

3. Set Up Before you begin the count note the location, time, day, date, weather, and other important information about your the place you are on every page of your forms for that specific space.

4. Do the Count Set your timer and screen line and keep your eyes on your space. Once you see people cross the screen line, mark them down on your map of the space, intersection, sidewalk, etc. We suggest using a simple tally method! for recording both walkers and bicyclists. Do not count someone until they have crossed the screen line.

SUPPLIES

PENS
CLIPBOARDS
COUNT FORMS
SNACKS
DRINKS
PORTABLE CHAIR
**Stay Organized** Counts can be easy, but staying organized will help you keep track of your forms when it comes time to analyze the data.

**Take Notes** Bring a field notebook to take note of the interesting things you notice while counting. Counting is an opportunity to spend time in a place, so bring a camera, and record what you see.

**Get Permission** Many public spaces are actually privately owned and managed, so ask for permission from the property owner before you count. If the property owner does not give access, a safe right-of-way (e.g. a sidewalk) can serve as a reasonable alternative.
Mark x if pedestrian was getting out the streetcar.
Mark ○ if pedestrian was waiting for streetcar.
One of the most important methods for understanding what people do in a public space is to go out into the field and observe. An activity scan is a structured method for observing what is going on in a space. Carrying out activity scans of various public spaces can help you better understand what goes on in a space, what draws people to a space, and what they do when they get there. You can also collect demographic data with activity scans, getting a better sense of who uses and passes through public space. It can be challenging to understand the perceptions of a place without experiencing it yourself, so taking time to observe, notate, and collect this information is critical to making sense of a public space.
WHEN SHOULD I SCAN?

The use of public space will differ depending on the day and time. A plaza near an office building might be busy on a weekday at noon during the lunch hour, but empty in the evening when workers leave. Due to the ebb and flow of people in spaces, observe these spaces on various days of the week. We recommend scanning a particular space at least three separate days over the course of a week; one weekday, a Friday, and one weekend day. Time of day can play an important role in what happens in a space, and we recommend spending 6 to 8 hours each day scanning, spread out over the course of the day; morning, noon, mid afternoon, and evening.

PROCEDURE

1. Find Your Spot Before you can perform the activity scans, it is important to find a spot within the space from which to observe. In large, busy spaces it’s challenging to see everything all at once, but finding a spot that allows you to see in most directions will help you be most productive.

2. Activity Data Using a chart allows you to collect approximate information about a person’s demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity) and what kind of activities are happening in the space (e.g., sitting, eating, using electronics).

3. Activity Map Using an activity map is a method to record where people are in a particular space and how they’re positioned (e.g., sitting or standing). You will need to include a legend with symbols to notate activities. The map should be consistent with the actual dimensions of the public space. Find a high-resolution aerial image of the space using Google Maps or similar service.

4. Movement Map Using a movement map allows helps you record the paths people take through a public space, revealing how people access a space. Note certain things that cannot be represented by a special line or symbol. For instance, you can tally the number of people who bike through a space, or those with mobility challenges. The map should be consistent with the actual dimensions of the public space, and identical to the activity map, but without a legend.

5. Set Up Before you begin the activity scan it is important to note the location, time, day, date, weather, and other important information about your area on every page of your scan forms for that specific space.

6. Perform the Activity Scan You will spend 10 minutes per hour, observing each chosen public space in pairs. This includes observing people lingering, and people just passing through. One scanner will record information about people lingering, and the other will record the movement of those passing through, rotating duties for each 10-minute session.
If possible, try to group up three spaces together and rotate between them each hour, scanning each spot for 10 minutes each rotation. This saves a considerable amount of time as it enables a team to scan three spots an hour. Here is a schedule you may follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity 1</th>
<th>Activity 2</th>
<th>Activity 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 - 9:10</td>
<td>Location #1</td>
<td>Fill out chart and activity map</td>
<td>Fill out movement map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:10 - 9:20</td>
<td>Walk to Location #2</td>
<td>Fill out movement map</td>
<td>Fill out chart and activity map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:20 - 9:30</td>
<td>Location #2</td>
<td>Fill out chart and activity map</td>
<td>Fill out movement map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 - 9:40</td>
<td>Walk to Location #3</td>
<td>Fill out movement map</td>
<td>Fill out chart and activity map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40 - 9:50</td>
<td>Location #3</td>
<td>Fill out chart and activity map</td>
<td>Fill out movement map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:50 - 10:00</td>
<td>Walk to Location #1 and repeat</td>
<td>Fill out chart and activity map</td>
<td>Fill out movement map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One possible schedule may be:

9 am to 1 pm
4 pm to 6 pm
7 pm to 9 pm

SUPPLIES

- PENS
- CLIPBOARDS
- ACTIVITY SCAN MAP
- DRINKS

ACTIVITY SCAN FORM
**TIPS**

**Double check your supplies** Have all the supplies you need, including clipboards, the correct forms, and pens (we suggest colored pens for map notation).

**Prepare for being outside all day** Bring a jacket, raincoat, hat, sunscreen, or whatever else you’ll need for the weather. Bring snacks, and water.

**Stay organized** You will deal with a lot of paperwork, so staying organized is crucial to making the scanning process efficient and easy. Make sure you are recording the location, time, day, date, and weather on every form.

**Take notes** You may see something interesting but have no place to record it in the chart or maps. Use the space for additional notes on the activity map to record these observations.

**Photographs** It is important to capture both interesting and mundane activities in your space. Taking lots of photographs helps others better understand your data, and can add life to your observation notes.

**Get Permission** Some public spaces are privately owned and managed, so get permission from the property owner first. If they don’t give you permission to be there, a safe right-of-way (e.g. a sidewalk) is a reasonable alternative.

**Stay on schedule** Make sure you are adhering closely to your schedule. If you are scanning multiple sites per hour, make sure you can get from one space to another in 10 minutes or less. If not, adjust your timetable to allow for longer observation periods. If possible, try to group up three spaces together and rotate between them each hour, scanning each spot for 10 minutes each rotation.
People walking through: ____________________________________________________________
Weidler St.

Broadway St.

12th

Weidler St.

Diary notes
In most neighborhoods, the most common public space is the street itself. In many cities, the street right-of-way can account for 30% or more of the total land area. A street right-of-way stretches in a line from the edge of the sidewalk nearest the building, across the street, to the edge of the sidewalk at the front of the opposite building. Streets that are designed with people in mind, encourage more pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and can help build community as people get to know their neighborhood. The concept of streets designed for people is fairly simple - if a street feels comfortable, more people will spend time there.
WHEN SHOULD I CONDUCT A STREETSCAPE EVALUATION?

You can conduct a street evaluation any time of day and on any day of the week. All times of day are beneficial for different reasons. The morning hours may provide a better understanding of a street’s aesthetics when it is less busy. During the day, however, the hustle and bustle of a street can allow you to see how people interact with the physical aspects of the street. Lastly, the evening hours may give you a better sense of where people go and how they spend their time in public.

PROCEDURE

1. Print a map Determine what area of the street you want to evaluate and print a map to use as your guide during your evaluation. Focus on one block at a time.

2. Explore the Street Start with the first block within you study area and explore the street based on a certain set of criteria - facades, commercial buildings, bike parking, seating, tables, etc. Check evaluation criteria list below for more ideas of things to look for.

3. Talk to Businesses and Tenants Talk to Businesses and Tenants During or after your street evaluation, be sure to spend some time talking with the business owners and employees along the street. These conversations will provide context and a better understanding of what is happening on the street and what aspects might be problematic.

SUPPLIES

- Pens
- Clipboards
- Aerial photographs
- Camera
- Sketchpad
- Markers
EVALUATION CRITERIA

Here are some things you might consider when evaluating your neighborhood streets. Think about how they can make the street comfortable and welcoming, take notes of things that stand out to you, and think about how your street compares to other places that you find more enjoyable.

**Color**  What is the dominant color on the block? Are the buildings drab or colorful?

**Bike parking**  If you arrived on a bike, how easy would it be to find a place to lock it up? How many bicycles could be parked on the block? Would you have to use informal things like signposts, or are there formal (and well designed!) bike racks?

**Seating**  Could you find a place to sit if you wanted to hang around? Is there formal seating, like benches, or are there informal seating options, like comfortable window ledges or wide planter boxes?

**Trees and Landscaping**  Are there trees along the street that shade the sidewalk, or plantings that add natural color?

**Awnings**  Do the shops have awnings too close to the windows, making it hard to see inside, or are the awnings dirty or torn? Are there building overhangs that provide bits of shade and protection from the rain?

**Curb Ramps and Crosswalks**  Could people using wheelchairs maneuver comfortably, or are there obstacles such as no curb ramps at corners? How far do you have to walk to get to a safe crosswalk?

**Facade Details**  At the ground floor level, do the buildings have elements that make them interesting to look at, or are the buildings uniform and uninviting? Are business signs creative or bland?

**Doors and Windows**  Can you see what’s going on in the shops and restaurants? Are people inside able to see you walking past outside? Are there bars on the windows?

**Variety of uses and buildings**  Are the blocks made up of single large buildings, or is there a variety along the street? Is there a mix of shops and building types?

**Parking between Street and Sidewalk**  Does the parking provide a physical protection to pedestrians from moving vehicles?

**Sidewalk Width and Quality**  Are there tree roots causing damage to the sidewalk? Is there enough space to comfortably pass your friend who uses a wheelchair?

**Street furniture**  Do cafes and restaurants have seating on the sidewalk? If so, is there enough space for others to comfortably pass by?

**Garbage and Recycling Cans**  Are garbage or recycling cans available on the sidewalk? Are they in working order?
**Measurements** If you want to measure things like the width of the sidewalk or the length of the block, pace it off. Most people’s stride is around 2.5 to 3 feet per step. You can also compare things to the width of a street lane - most lanes in city streets are around 11 or 12 feet wide. And you can always check on Google Maps using satellite view - just right click, and then measure.

**Building Footprints and Maps** Google Maps can be a great resource for helping you study your neighborhood. Zooming into Google Maps will normally show you the outlines of the buildings (footprints), and you can print these as screenshots to use as a guide and a method for notating your evaluation.

**Photographs** Take pictures of interesting things you see! A trash can that blocks the sidewalk, a colorful mural, or an interesting architectural detail on your favorite building. Photographs can make sense of your evaluation study period and help you remember important things.

**Check The City Code** See if your city code would allow the installation of things like benches, trees, and bike racks, and find out what the policies are that affect what businesses and residents can do to improve the street for people. After talking with business owners, you may be able to get them to help with improvements that you think would make the street more comfortable.
Surveys, activity scans, and counts are effective tools for measuring public space, but they have their limitations. People will take a survey, but they may not answer it to the level of detail you would like. Activity scans may explain what a person is doing, but not why they are doing it. Bicycle and pedestrian counts quantify access to a public space, but they make little sense of how people use the space. Sometimes the most important aspects of a place cannot be measured, and because of this, more engagement might be required. Listening to the stories people tell about a place can help better understand the area you are working in.
WHEN TO DO OTHER ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES?

Engaging with the public takes time, so being smart about when you deploy other engagement activities is crucial. We attended already established meetings and recurring events, and went to the places where people were. People lead busy lives and asking for their time to attend a new group or a new meeting can be difficult. Using opportunities that already exist to talk to people saves time for you and the people you want to learn from.

OTHER ENGAGEMENT IDEAS

1. **Attend local meetings** A great way to get a first-hand account of issues and interests of a street, neighborhood, or community is to attend a local meeting. Attending meetings to listen or take part by eliciting feedback from attendees about a specific space you are studying can provide useful information for your study.

2. **Tabling** If the neighborhood or area you are studying has events, setting up a table and interacting with people is an excellent way to ask questions and get feedback. We found that farmers markets are great opportunities for tabling because people are in a good mood and happy to provide insight.

3. **Interview** Setting up individual interviews with stakeholders in a public space can be enlightening. Business owners, property managers, neighborhood association members, security people, and other members of the community can often bring to the table past successes, failures, and general knowledge of a space you are studying, providing you with a better understanding of your space.

4. **Business Pop-ins** More casual and spontaneous than structured interviews, popping into local businesses in or around the space you are studying can help give you on-the-spot feedback. Sometimes, business owners or employees are too busy to take a survey or attend a meeting, but going to where they are and asking simple questions about a public space can be helpful in your research.

5. **Walking Tours** Getting out and about with community members and stakeholders to see, feel, hear, and experience a public space together can be a meaningful activity. Walking tours can fill in the gaps that a survey, interview, or observation might miss. Some people need to be in a space and experience it to provide their opinion on it, and a walking tour can do just that.
Congratulations! You have gathered data and gained a better understanding of your place. Now it is time to start working to meet the needs of your community. There are many ways that you can use public space to make your place better. Start talking with your neighbors, local non-profits, businesses, and public officials about what you learned and begin to find opportunities to make a difference.

Urban design is important and can influence community activity, but thriving public spaces start and end with people. Great public spaces can develop almost anywhere when people are the focus.
Resources for Further Exploration of Public Space

Project For Public Spaces
Tactical Urbanism Guide
Planetizen
Gehl People
Urban Street Design Guide by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)
The American Planning Association
The International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP)