

# How to Evaluate

# USE OF PUBLIC SPACE



## Highlights

- If you want a space that is vibrant and uplifting, evaluation is necessary.
- The secret to Orange Places? Consistent evaluation methods.
- To scale those arduous “best practices”, consider a simpler form of evaluation.
- Sustainable and consistent evaluation is better than no evaluation at all.
- If you don’t do something with the data you collect, your effort is wasted. Set goals, pursue strategies, and track your progress.

## Overview

This two-page handout introduces the concept of evaluating use of public space to inform development decisions and provides tips to help you get started.

## Why Should I Evaluate?

Imagine the most incredible place you’ve ever visited. It could be a public plaza, market, or even an amusement park. Chances are that it has someone (or a team) evaluating its use: counting how many people visit and collecting feedback about if those people plan to pay a return visit.

Evaluation is tedious, even boring. But if you want a space that is vibrant and uplifting, evaluation is necessary.

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# The secret to Orange Places? Consistent evaluation methods.

## Tip #1: Find Your Methods

In the realm of public space management, very few people conduct evaluation because the “best practices” are overwhelming, not to mention would take an army of people to pursue. Very few agencies have the resources or capacity to pull it off.

To scale those arduous “best practices”, consider a simpler form of evaluation. Instead of sitting at a park making notes every three months, visit the park each month and conduct a “snapshot” at designated times. How many people are there? Who are they? What are they doing?

This is just an idea. What will work for you?

## Tip #3: Use the Findings

If you don't do something with all that data you collect, your effort is wasted. Set goals, pursue strategies, and use the data to track your progress. A bonus? You can show these results to stakeholders, decision-makers, and grantmakers, who can further your work.

## Tip #2: Do the Work

Some people love the *idea* of data collection, but then they don't follow through with it. Though collecting data that informs your evaluation may not be glamorous, you can reframe it to be somewhat enjoyable.

One key to conducting evaluation is keeping it manageable. If you set up a data collection system that becomes too time-consuming and stressful, perhaps it's time to scale back or change your methodology. Sustainable and consistent evaluation is better than no evaluation at all.

And instead of “data collection,” call it “field work.” It's more fun! And includes a picnic?



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