

How to Host

PUBLIC SPACE AUDITS



Highlights

- Public space audits are meetings that invite decision-makers to experience a built environment.
- The success of a public space audit comes down to the when and the who.
- Before planning your audit, ask yourself, “Can we still influence decisions about this space?”
- Limit the guestlist to 15 essential people but include both people with decision-making power and community members.
- Avoid placing blame about past decisions. Focus on the future.

Overview

This two-page handout introduces the concept of public space audits and provides a few tips to get you in the mindset for hosting audits in your neighborhood.

What are Public Space Audits?

Public space audits are meetings that invite decision-makers to experience a built environment (like a park or streetscape) firsthand and learn about applying best practices to that space.

Public space audits are as unique as the spaces they are held, but the goal is always the same: help the audit participants identify the realities of the space and educate about best practices that can be applied in the future.

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The success of a public space audit comes down to the **when** and the **who**.

Tip #1: Check the Timing

A public space audit usually takes place as part of a project planning process. Early intervention within project planning is important because decision-making about public space is a lengthy process.

You must think ahead – perhaps even six to seven years ahead of the scheduled project! Instead of being reactive, some people even hope to inspire a project by hosting a public space audit when no project is scheduled.

It's a waste of time if you host an audit when design decisions are set in stone. Before planning your audit, ask yourself, "Can we still influence decisions about this space?"

Tip #3: Focus on Future

A common error in public space audits occurs when community members blame decision-makers for the current shortcomings of the space being visited. An audit is not about the past. It's about creating a better future through aligning and strengthening community expertise.

Tip #2: Mind the Guestlist

It's important that people with decision-making power (elected officials, planners, engineers) participate in an audit exercise.

It's equally important that community members who can advocate on behalf of project users participate. Imagine a street near a middle school will be reconstructed; a school bus driver and a student who walks to school might be among audit participants.

Audits can be a powerful engagement and buy-in tool for public space owners. But beware: an audit is less effective when too many people are involved. We suggest limiting the guestlist to 15 essential people.



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