

# Placemaking

## Expanding Our Reach and Empowering Communities

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**D**ue to COVID, communities across the globe have had to rethink ways to safely connect and engage with one another. One option that has emerged is placemaking, “a collaborative process of people coming together to create the great public spaces at the heart of their communities.”<sup>1</sup>

Rooted in urban design, placemaking has enabled some communities to successfully negotiate COVID challenges while participating in a process that also has the potential to transform our post-pandemic world. Because 80 percent of children's time is spent outside of school, it is exceptionally important for communities to leverage opportunities for them to learn beyond classroom walls. Libraries and other community partners can share placemaking resources while exploring new ways to harness placemaking principles to create better social, cultural, and economic outcomes. This is important since many of today's youth and families are living in inequitable spaces.<sup>2</sup>

### Project for Public Spaces

<https://www.pps.org/>

Project for Public Spaces has a long history of using placemaking to help communities transform public spaces to meet local needs. In addition to defining placemaking, their website describes their consulting and training services and a vast number of placemaking projects. Their site hosts a large number of freely accessible reports, guides, webinars, and blog entries on the subject.

### Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking

<https://www.brookings.edu/center/anne-t-and-robert-m-bass-center-for-transformative-placemaking/>

A collaboration between the Project for Public Spaces and the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Center that conducts and disseminates research, papers, blog posts, and multimedia on placemaking to help practitioners transform public spaces.

### Outside the Box—Placemaking, Partnerships, and Community Event Design

[https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/Libraries\\_Go\\_Outside\\_the\\_Box\\_with\\_Redbox.html](https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/Libraries_Go_Outside_the_Box_with_Redbox.html)

This webinar addresses how libraries can leverage placemaking and Redbox's Outside the Box program to create attractive and engaging

community spaces. After defining placemaking and explaining how the process unfolds, it describes the qualities that make libraries great community spaces including offering a “front porch” to users that is inviting and easy to access, a flexible use of the space that supports different purposes, seasonal usage, and having the ability to manage and organize events.

The webinar also explores additional elements that make places great and explains how to undertake a placemaking project with key stakeholders and partners.

## Outside the Box: A Guide for Placemakers

<https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/2015-04/guide-outside-the-box-placemaking.pdf>

Authored by the Project for Public Spaces, this guide was designed to accompany the previously mentioned webinar. It explains the impact and benefits of placemaking, and also explains fourteen qualities that allow libraries to become community anchors. This document also offers readers a step by step guide to placemaking.

## Playful Learning Landscapes

<https://kathyhirshpasek.com/learning-landscapes/>

Playful Learning Landscapes (PLL) transform everyday spaces to support learning and family engagement while employing urban planning, the learning sciences, and placemaking. Research-based activities connect play and learning, and studies show that there are long-term benefits. This website unpacks the movement and shares information on various projects, including the following:

- Supermarket Speak,<sup>3</sup> which interspersed signs throughout supermarkets to increase the quantity and quality of conversations between caregivers and their children, and
- Too Small to Fail, which uses similar conversation producing signage along with play spaces in laundromats and playgrounds.<sup>4</sup>

## City of Philadelphia Playstreets of Wonder

<https://www.phila.gov/programs/playstreets/>

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation started this initiative more than fifty years ago. Designated streets are closed to traffic for a set time so children have a safe space to play during the summer months. Snacks and meals are also provided. The website details the program requirements and expectations and shares photos.

## Street Lab

<https://www.streetlab.org>

A nonprofit organization that works to transform city neighborhoods into safe and comfortable spaces for people to gather. They partner with city agencies and community groups to provide pop-up programs and services. StreetLab is best known for its portable library structures, but has organized a range of projects over the years. In response to COVID, for example, they set up no-touch obstacle courses, pop-up meeting spaces for New York City students, and implemented a program to encourage community art installations.

## The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit

<https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2019/Pop-Up-Tool-Kit-112119-w-singles.pdf>

Co-authored by Team Better Block and AARP Livable Communities, this tool kit explains what pop-up demonstrations are, offers reasons for doing them, and provides step-by-step directions for implementation. It includes a catalog of projects with photos and shares success stories of pop-up projects that transformed into permanent community fixtures. &

## References

1. “Outside the Box: A Community Connector,” webinar, Outside the Box—Placemaking, Partnerships & Community Event Design, OCLC, October 23, 2013.
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3. Playful Learning Landscapes, “Supermarket Speak,” accessed August 13, 2021, <https://playfullearninglandscapes.com/project/supermarket-speak/>; Katherine E. Ridge et al., “Supermarket Speak: Increasing Talk Among Low-Socioeconomic Status Families,” *Mind, Brain and Education* 9, no 3 (2015): 127–35, <https://kathyhirshpasek.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2018/06/3.-Supermarket-Speak-Ridge-et-al.pdf>.
4. “Too Small to Fail, Coin Laundry Association & Partners Launch First National Effort to Provide Early Learning Resources in Laundromats for Low Income Families,” Too Small to Fail, 2015, <http://toosmall.org/news/press-releases/too-small-to-fail-coin-laundry-association-partners-launch-first-national-effort-to-provide-early-learning-resources-in-laundromats-for-low-income-families>; Emily DeRuy, “The Playground Where Babies Learn to Talk,” *Atlantic*, February 24, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/12/the-playground-where-babies-learn-to-talk/509420/>.