

Shaping places together

Ideas for co-designing places

Draft for consultation



Transport for NSW acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal people and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

Many of the transport routes we use today – from rail lines, to roads, to water crossings – follow the traditional Songlines, trade routes and ceremonial paths in Country that our nation's First Peoples followed for tens of thousands of years.

Transport for NSW is committed to honouring Aboriginal peoples' cultural and spiritual connections to the lands, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

Cover image:

Students participating in a co-design workshop for Parramatta Park
as part of the [Safer Cities program](#)

Credit: Transport for NSW



Participants on a walkshop (walking workshop) in the Lismore CBD, conducted by Lismore City Council as part of the [Safer Cities: Her Way](#) program
Credit: Natskyy

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Introduction

Overview

The purpose of this guide is to outline a collaborative process of engagement that partners with community and users in shaping places. The process is called co-design.

Public spaces and transport hub precincts enable people to connect to each other and participate in public life.

Shaping places with the communities who use them can add social value by creating or strengthening relationships between people and place. The quality of a place is reflected not only in its physical form and the activities it supports but also in how it is designed, maintained and integrated with its context. The process can be just as important as the outcome.

Connecting with Country

All public space in NSW is on Country, which is at the core of every Aboriginal person's identity and sense of belonging. It is the place from which Aboriginal languages and cultures are derived, which determine families, kinship and communities. Aboriginal peoples are the Traditional Custodians of all public space in New South Wales. Acknowledging and valuing Aboriginal peoples and cultural knowledge when public space is planned, managed and delivered can promote and strengthen connection to Country and create healing for both Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal peoples too.

Purpose of guide

This guide can be used by anyone wanting to apply co-design when shaping places. This guide outlines ways to help embed collaboration in creating great places with, not just for, communities.

In the context of streets and transport hub precincts, this guide can be used in conjunction with the core process of the [Movement & Place Framework](#).

This guide outlines four key steps for co-design, including guiding principles and activities that project teams can undertake. The process and ideas within this guide can be applied to a wide variety of place projects, whether at the early stages of planning or managing a new place or looking for new ways to revitalise an existing place.

This guide also includes a glossary of activities, a checklist to determine if this is the right approach for your project and a guide to planning an immersive place-based walking workshop, also called a 'walkshop.'

What are public spaces?

The [NSW Public Spaces Charter](#) defines public spaces as all places that are publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. They include:



Streets

Streets, avenues and boulevards, squares and plazas, pavements, passages and lanes, and bicycle paths.



Public open spaces

Both active and passive (including parks, gardens, playgrounds, public beaches, riverbanks and waterfronts, outdoor playing fields and courts, and publicly accessible bushland).



Public facilities

Such as public libraries, museums, galleries, civic/community centres, showgrounds and indoor public sports facilities.

This guide is also relevant for public spaces in transport hub precincts. Transport hub precincts include areas in close proximity to:

Bus stops, interchanges, train stations, light rail or tram stops, ferry wharves, cycleways, and taxi or rideshare ranks.

The quality of public space

The quality of public space including in transport hub precincts is important as quality makes people feel safe, welcome and included. The quality of a place is reflected not only in its physical form — how it's designed, maintained and integrated with its environment — but also through the activities it supports and the meaning it holds. Using the [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#) or the [draft Community Survey Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#), a place can be evaluated by asking:

- Am I able to get there?
- Am I able to play and participate?
- Am I able to stay?
- Am I able to connect?

Students participating in a walkshop (walking workshop) in the Moore Park Precinct along a pathway connecting to the tram as part of the [Safer Cities program](#)
Credit: Transport for NSW

NSW Public Spaces Charter

The [NSW Public Spaces Charter](#) was developed to support the planning, management and activation of public spaces like streets in NSW. It identifies 10 principles and three core values for quality public space, developed through evidence-based research and engagement with experts and community members. There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to place. Every place has its own unique history, heritage, context and is supporting the different needs and uses of specific communities.

Movement and Place

The [NSW Movement and Place Framework](#) facilitates an iterative and collaborative process for the planning and design of movement systems and successful places. The Framework can be useful at all stages in the delivery of a project or program, as well as in the ordinary operation and maintenance of the built environment. The [Practitioner's Guide to Movement and Place](#) explains how to collaborate on projects across all stages of design and delivery. Co-design supports the integrated and holistic approach championed by Movement and Place.

What is co-design?

Co-design is a process of engagement that involves people as "experts of their experience" throughout the process of creating or shaping a public space or transport hub precinct.

This approach combines the wisdom of lived experience with the expertise of professionals to clarify problems and develop innovative solutions that meet the specific needs and aspirations of those involved. It is characterised by iteration and inclusivity. In a co-design process, those who stand to benefit the most are actively involved in defining the problem and proposing solutions. Using this relationship-based approach can also help lead to immediate and long-term social value, by leveraging collaboration between community, industry and government to align projects with local needs.

Co-design is different from other processes of engagement. While it does not reduce the role of design expertise, in co-design, decision-making power is shared and mutual learning is encouraged, with the goal of creating with users, rather than for them.

Benefits of this process

Co-design can lead to a deeper understanding of complex challenges and creative and innovative solutions that better meet the needs of the people who use a place and reflect their unique identity. By including community in the design of the places they use, a co-design process can help to build a greater sense of ownership, belonging and pride in the space, resulting in people being more likely to adopt, use and care for the space themselves. Other benefits include:

- Designing solutions that are grounded in both community need and stakeholder parameters;
- Identifying and mitigating unintended consequences;
- Bringing people with diverse skills and experiences together to reduce the likelihood of decision bias; and
- Supporting the development of trusting relationships between the community and government.

Tip: Terminology in this guide

'Participants' refers specifically to those that are involved or engaged through the co-design process. Terms like 'community,' 'users' and 'people' refer to the broader community that may use the public space or transport hub precinct. 'Stakeholders' refers to a person/s that have an interest in the project or place. These could be business owners, land owners, or community groups.

Key principles

There is no one size fits all technique to this approach, however there are key principles that can be applied to help guide a successful co-design process.



Inclusivity

Bring people with lived experience together with technical experts and decision-making authorities on an equal footing. Activities should be undertaken in a space that people can access easily and express their ideas without judgement.



Transparency

Honesty and trust are key ingredients of this approach. It's important to share information and resources so that everyone can participate.



Immersion

Connect to the place that you are creating or shaping. Meet on-site wherever possible, and allow time for exploring and experiencing the place as a group as part of the process.



Iteration

Factor in time to evaluate how the process is going for the project and for those involved. Consider how you can apply the process across the lifecycle of a project, rather than as a one-off tool.



Curiosity

Start your process with questions, not solutions.



Empathy

The co-design process should aim to build respect and an understanding among the different needs, perspectives, challenges and aspirations of stakeholders and community.



Building capacity

Support, knowledge, tools, and encouragement should be provided to facilitate productive ideation.

The process on a page

What is co-design?

Co-design is a process of engagement that allows for collaboration between government, community, industry and stakeholders. It is a process of working together to identify challenges and create solutions that seek to address the needs and aspirations of all involved.

Co-design can be used in a range of settings, including to shape systems, programs and services, as well as strategic plans and physical places.

Each step is explained on pages 8-18.

How is this different to other forms of engagement?

The [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\) Public Participation Spectrum](#) sets out differing levels of participation that define the public's role in any community engagement program. The process of co-design touches different parts of the spectrum, however it is most aligned to **Collaborate** and **Empower**.

Co-design is exemplified by the statement: "We will implement what we decide, together."

The key differences to other forms of engagement is the involvement of communities or users as "experts of their experience," combined with the expertise of professionals to clarify problems and develop innovative solutions. In this process, decision-making power is shared. This process is not always linear; feedback loops and responsive adjustments are made along the way.

Step 1: Frame and find

Defining the problem and involving the right people

- A. Define
- B. Prepare
- C. Involve



Step 2: Examine and explore

Developing a shared understanding of the project

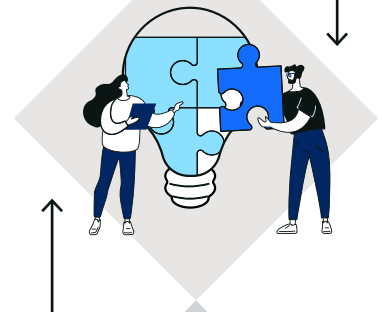
- A. Kick-off
- B. Discover
- C. Analyse



Step 3: Imagine and initiate

Setting the vision and co-creating solutions

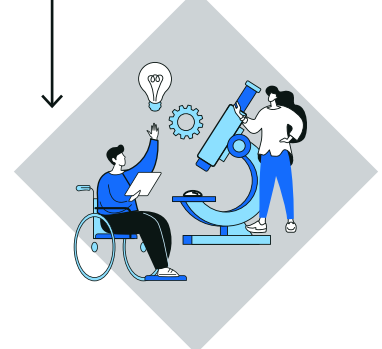
- A. Create
- B. Establish
- C. Co-create and select



Step 4: Test and trial

Testing ideas in place and learning and refining along the way

- A. Test and trial
- B. Evaluate
- C. Refine



Get started on the process

Before starting: Is this the right approach?

Working together to identify challenges and create solutions that address the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders is crucial for any place. It is important to determine if co-design is the right process for your project as applying the process in its fullest form can be time- and resource-intensive. Aside from reading and understanding the steps in this guide, you can refer to the [Checklist: Is co-design right for my project? on page 19](#).

While not every project will have the capacity or opportunity to complete each step of the co-design process, the principles of co-design, and some of the guidance provided in this resource, can still help to create a collaborative process and shared outcome. Other frameworks, such as [Movement & Place](#), and other forms of engagement like consultation and surveys could be used in place of a full co-design process.

If you have decided that co-design is right for your project, you should also check that you have:

- **Organisational commitment** to conduct the co-design in line with key principles and respond to the outcomes of the co-design and to support the implementation of solutions that arise from the co-design;
- **Funding** to undertake the co-design and to implement the proposed solutions;
- **Sufficient time** to go through the co-design process and engage with stakeholders through every stage of the process; and
- **A clear co-design problem statement**, which summarises the project's aims and objectives, what is in scope and what is out of scope.

Other things you might need to know or consider are:

- **Clarity** on approval processes that may affect the implementation of selected solutions;
- **Roles and responsibilities** of those involved, including your project team, internal and external stakeholders, community members or specific groups;
- **Potential risks** and how you might mitigate them; and
- **Alignment** to supporting strategies and plans specific to your organisation or the broader context of your project.

Finally, it is vital to ask if undertaking the process will add value to the community you are working with.

“The co-design approach provided a unique opportunity for us to collaborate with our community to not only find the right problems to solve, but to also bring them along on the journey of designing, testing and evaluating the potential solutions.”

Central Coast Council



Participants stop to discuss a places in a transport hub precinct during a walkshop conducted by Central Coast Council as part of the [Safer Cities: Her Way program](#)
Credit: Matthew Horspool and Central Coast Council

Step 1: Frame and find

Defining the problem and involving the right people



This step involves setting the scope and objectives of the co-design process, identifying the key partners stakeholders who will be involved in the process, and engaging with them to build a shared understanding of the project goals. It aims to give all participants a clear understanding of the project's purpose and to create a collaborative and trusting environment for all who are involved.

A. Define the parameters

Start with the issue or problem your project aims to address. Prepare a detailed plan on what you want to achieve, including clarification of scope, budget and timeframes, and how the co-design process will fit within the project. It may be helpful to define the 'place' or the project's boundaries. Mapping the place in terms of its connections to other places and stakeholder relationships can help identify who may need to be involved. Use this information to prepare your engagement plan.

B. Prepare your engagement plan and resources

Prepare a co-design engagement plan that maps out the whole process. This can include identification of participants and methods of engagement. If resources allow, consider engaging independent specialists to support you. You can use the [Checklist: Activities for my project on page 20](#) to plan out the different activities you can do in each step of the process.

- **The 'co-design collective':** Identifying the right mix of individuals or groups who should be involved in the process and understanding their relationship to the place or project can help ensure the process is effective.
- Stakeholder mapping can help build your 'co-design collective', a group of people who will remain consistent throughout the entire process. This should include senior representatives who have the authority to make decisions, those who are managing and working on the project, in-house or a diverse group of internal or external resources, and, most importantly, community participants whose lived experiences and knowledge will enrich the process.
- **Prepare resources:** Consider all the things that each participant will need to meaningfully participate in the process. It is crucial to provide the necessary support, information, compensation, resources and tools for participants to engage fully in the co-design process.

Other resources can include:

- a collection of relevant historical, demographic and planning data;
- real or near-time data, which can include people counts, environmental data, traffic and transport data;
- site maps;
- site analysis which may include any heritage and cultural or environmental considerations; and
- any findings from previous or ongoing engagements.

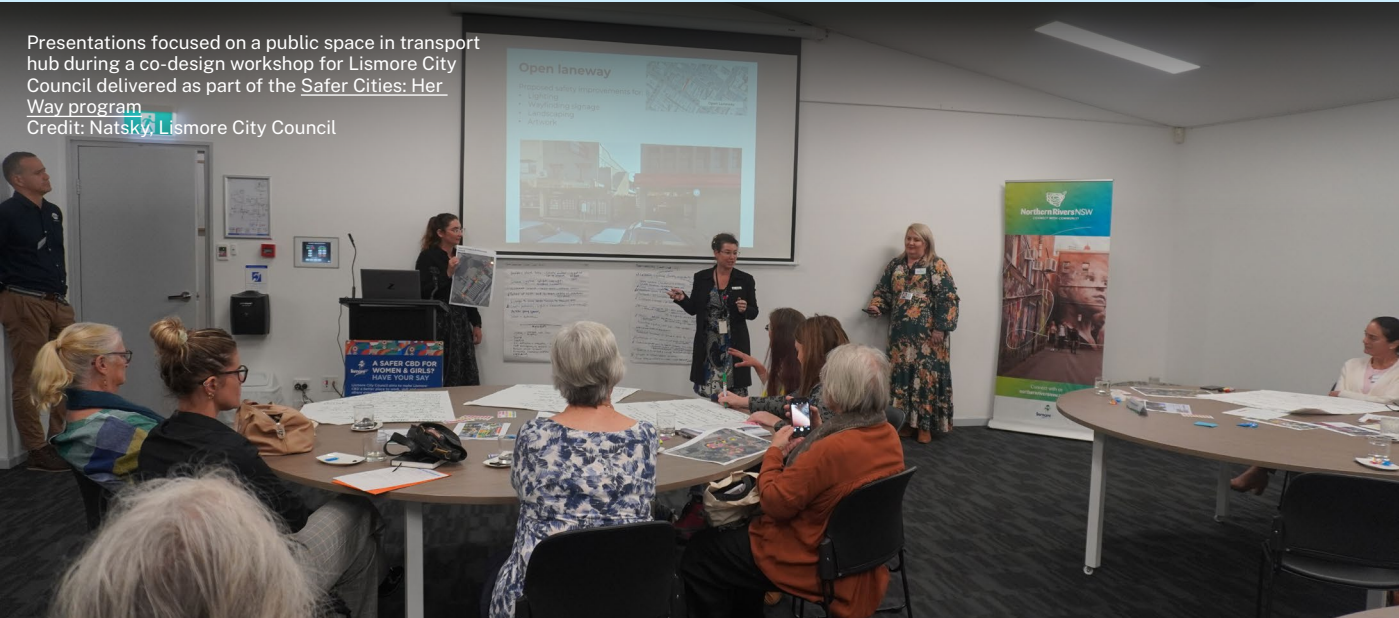
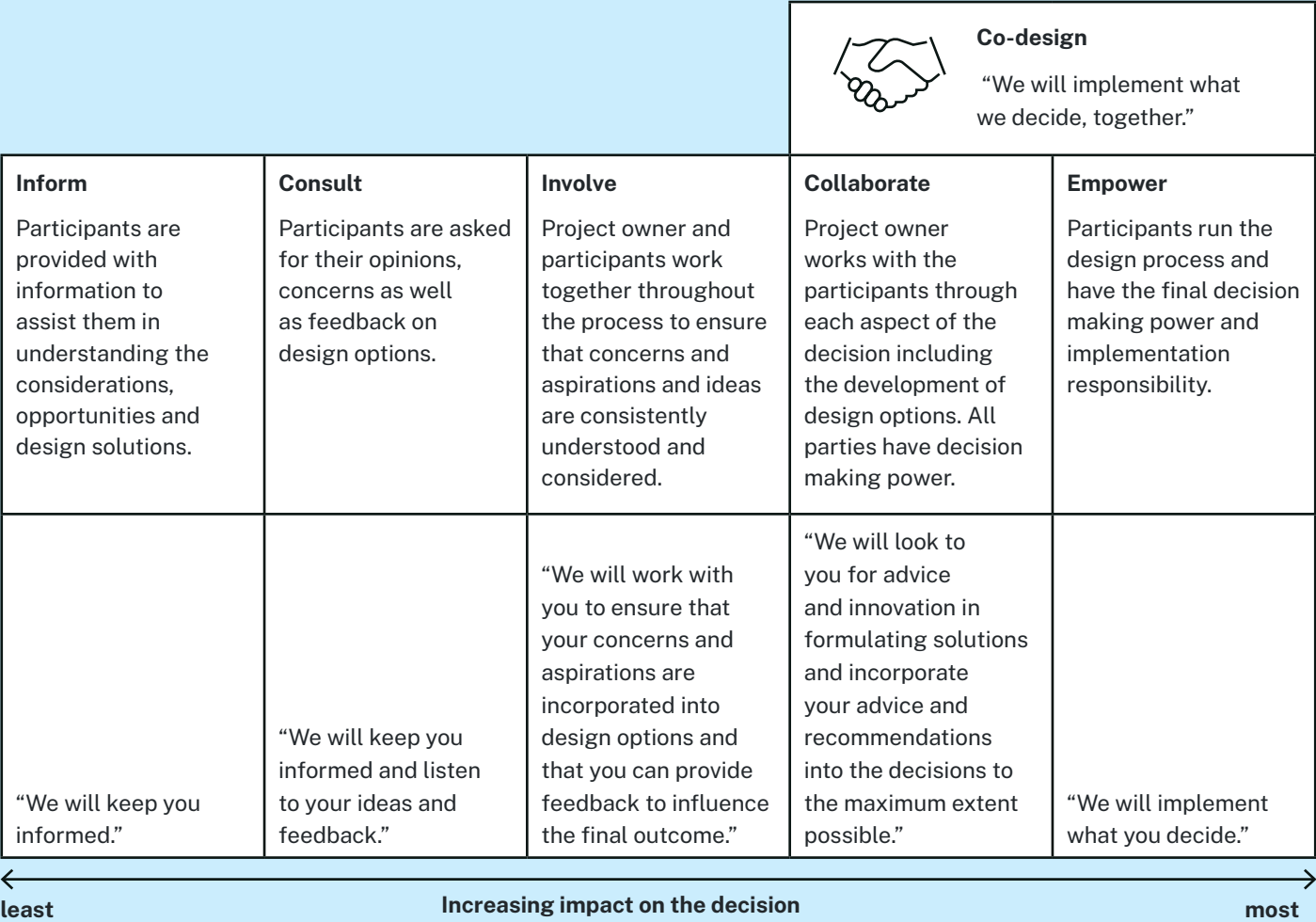
C. Involve the right people

- **Ensure equitable representation:** This could include community, stakeholders, First Nations Peoples, government officials, professionals, different genders, and various age groups in a co-design process. Consider any cultural or social factors that might impact their ability to participate, and incentives (financial or non-financial) for their time and insights. Other considerations could include intersectionality and including future users who may not be visible in the space currently. To ensure a highly collaborative and meaningful process, consider limiting the participants to a maximum of 20-25 people per session including facilitators based on the project's complexity. See ['The people in your process' on page 12](#).
- **Terms of reference:** Once you've recruited participants, provide them a terms of reference (ToR). It should outline the objectives, scope, expectations from the co-design process and how you will make decisions. The ToR should provide clarity on the purpose and goals of the project, what is expected of participants, logistics and the details of any incentives provided. Consider details like time commitment over the process, how many meetings you will need and what procedures will be in place for meetings. Any non-disclosure or photography release forms can also be attached as part of the ToR, if relevant.
- **Choose a skilled facilitator:** Effective facilitation and communication are key to enabling participation, as they can help build trust and foster a sense of ownership and accountability within your group. Select a facilitator who will be able to best work with your group. Ideally, the same facilitator should work with the co-design collective throughout the entire process for consistency, building relationships and trust.

How is this different to other forms of engagement?

The [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\) Public Participation Spectrum](#) sets out differing levels of participation that define the public’s role in any community engagement program. The approach set out in this guide touches upon different parts of the spectrum. It is most aligned to ‘Collaborate’ and ‘Empower.’ Working together to identify challenges and create solutions that address the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders is crucial for any public space. While not every project may have the resources or support this approach entirely, the principles and processes outlined in this guide can be applied to create a more collaborative and inclusive process or outcome.

The diagram below illustrates the IAP2 spectrum and where co-design sits within the spectrum.



Presentations focused on a public space in transport hub during a co-design workshop for Lismore City Council delivered as part of the [Safer Cities: Her Way program](#). Credit: Natsky, Lismore City Council

Step 2: Examine and explore

Developing a shared understanding of the project



This step is focused on gathering insights and building empathy among participants and stakeholders. The purpose is to gain a deep understanding of user needs, values, and preferences, as well as the broader context in which the final solution/s will be implemented and managed.

It is important to guide participants in undertaking place-based research as some of them may not be familiar with the process. There are a range of tools and materials that you can use in the [Great Places Toolkit](#) that can help guide your participants.

A. Kick-off your process

At the beginning of the process, bring the participants together in an in-person, online or hybrid workshop. If you are meeting in-person, it is recommended that you meet at the place or nearby. The kick-off should include:

- A presentation on the objectives of your project, what the co-design process involves, its principles, and a clarification of what is in scope and what is not based on the plan you prepared in [Step 1A](#), and what the collective's role is in the process;
- A series of facilitated activities designed to build personal rapport, trust and empathy with a particular focus on 'getting to know you' activities where participants learn about each other through the lens of the place or project context;
- A presentation of what you already know including any data and maps; and
- A session to gather insights from the participants on their user experiences of the place.

B. Discover place

Equipping the participants with in-depth place knowledge is important for having informed discussions. Consider using a variety of activities. These activities can be done by your project team and with your participants. Doing the activities together can enrich your shared understanding of the place and help equip your participants to engage deeply in the following steps. It can also build empathy between stakeholders and participants.

Activities could include:

- **Place evaluation:** Use the [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#) to understand what is working well and what improvements could be made to a place.
(See '[Using data as part of the process](#)' on pages 14-15.)

- **User behaviour:** Map user behaviour in places to understand how different people use the space at different times of the day and week and identify areas for improvement. Identifying user profiles and daily journeys can also be a useful way of understanding how places are used on a daily basis, and for getting participants to think about how places are experienced in other people's shoes.
- **Place-based and immersive workshops (walking workshops):** Conduct place-based and immersive workshops to gather insights on how the participants interact with the place. Explore conducting these workshops at different times of the day. You may consider getting in touch with a representative of the Country your project will take place on. Refer to [How to: Planning a workshop on page 21](#) for more detail.
- **Qualitative methods:** Methods like mutual learning and story sharing can help to understand what people value about a place and what their pain points are.

C. Analyse place

Utilise the data and insights that have been collected to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the place in collaboration with participants. You can utilise a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. For roads, streets, and transport hub precincts, you can utilise the activities outlined in [Steps 1 and 2 of the core process of Movement and Place](#).

This exercise provides a valuable opportunity for participants and stakeholders to share their observations, gain a shared understanding of the project and view the project from a holistic perspective.

This analysis could be done as a group in a 'Place Analysis' workshop. Once you have completed your analysis, collate the findings of the research into themes or categories. These themes can point to specific ideas for the project or indicate areas of improvement that may have not been discussed prior to this process.

The people in your process

However you choose to involve people in your project, finding the right people and providing them with the necessary support throughout the process is crucial for genuine co-design. Even if you do not apply the co-design process at its fullest, supporting your participants along the way fulfills the key principles and can lead to a range of benefits associated with co-design.

Finding the right people

Finding the right people starts with knowing who they are. You can make use of existing data sets such as the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) and [NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure's population projections](#) to find the people that are right for the co-design process.

By analysing this data, you can gain an understanding of the current and future demographic profile of people who will live near the public space or transport hub precinct and its surroundings.

Once you have this information, you can identify the demographic composition of people that you would like to involve. This could include people from different locations, genders, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as various age groups.

Based on your definition of the 'place' and the project's boundaries, identify broad stakeholder groups like local businesses, workers, schools, or community groups that you could reach out to to help find the right participants for your co-design. You can utilise an expression of interest to invite people to participate while balancing the diversity of the cohort and stakeholders.

Demographic and market researchers can also help match required demographics, reduce selection bias and reach people who may not always participate. To help recruit the right people, provide a clear brief on the project purpose, overall timeline, the intended number of workshops, any co-design collective incentives, and logistical details such as where the workshops are likely to be held.

Providing participants with the support they need

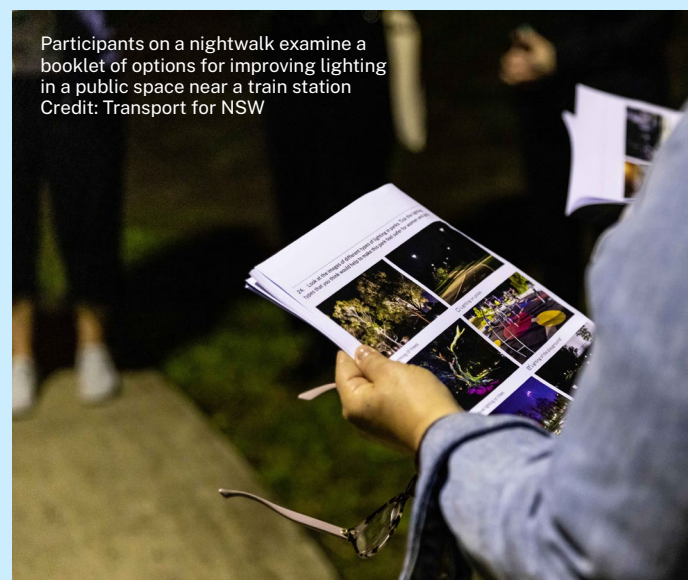
Ask participants to communicate any accessibility requirements or other special requirements to help you plan for and deliver an inclusive engagement program. This may include accommodating people with disabilities, neurodiverse people or people with language requirements. For in-person engagement, consider the accessibility of the venue/s and for online/hybrid engagement be sure to ensure your platform meets your participants' needs.

If any participant in the co-design process or co-design collective has experienced trauma related to the discussion topic, it is important to ensure that everyone feels comfortable and supported. Having a trained professional present to assist with the discussion may help. These experiences may impact participation, and it is important to be aware of these challenges in advance.

Consider if your facilitator has the skills to communicate effectively with the group. For example, if you are looking to involve diverse communities, can your facilitator communicate in language or do you have resources for translating materials and activities?

In order to be inclusive by design, it is also important to think about your chosen activities. For example, if you have neurodivergent participants, are there any social barriers to participation you can remove?

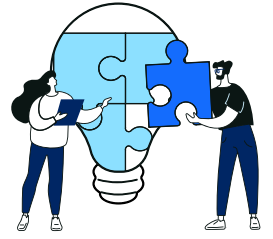
Lastly, think about the context in which participants are engaging with other stakeholders or professionals and how your facilitator and your activities can acknowledge this. Consider power-interest roles within the participant groups and potential group dynamics that could affect processes, project inputs and outcomes. For example, are there trust issues between a specific user group and a stakeholder? Could there be a community leader or Elder who can help facilitate to allow healing and re-connection?



Participants on a nightwalk examine a booklet of options for improving lighting in a public space near a train station
Credit: Transport for NSW

Step 3: Imagine and initiate

Setting the vision and co-creating solutions you want to see implemented



The purpose of this step is to create a shared vision, agree on what the main problem is and begin to co-create potential solutions. The co-design process encourages creativity, experimentation, and the development of innovative, feasible, and desirable solutions together as a group.

Major themes from these discussions, as well as from previous steps, can serve as the foundation for co-designed solutions. This can help make the process more collaborative and ensures the needs and expectations of participants are met.

A. Create a shared vision

Revisit the project's original aims and objectives. Has anything changed? Have you learned anything new? Using this knowledge and your shared understanding, agree on the project's goal or vision. Consider the following exercises for this step:

- **Character words:** Offer a selection of descriptive words that convey the desired character of the place. Participants can choose the words that best align with their vision for the future.
- **Place images:** Present an assortment of images showcasing diverse places with unique elements. Participants can select the images that best represent their desired character for the place.
- **Scenario planning:** Create a few plausible scenarios for the future of the place. Participants can consider different factors such as changes in population demographics or emerging technologies.

B. Establish the problem

Bring together the plan you created in [Step 1A](#) together with what you have learned from the Place Analysis in [Step 2C](#). Identify any emerging gaps, issues and opportunities together as a group.

Write “how-might-we?” questions to help generate creative solutions and keep the focus on the problems that need to be solved. When formulating these questions, avoid including specific suggestions or ideas, and instead focus on the agreed outcomes and vision. Keep the questions positive and ask three at the most.

For example:

- How might we make this place feel safer for women and girls at night-time?
- How might we create a more welcoming environment for people from diverse cultural backgrounds?
- How might we make this place more flexible to adapt to the community's changing needs?

C. Co-create and select your solutions

To generate innovative solutions that can be achieved within the defined scope of works, it's important to use engaging and creative methods that encourage participation from all involved. In-house or external resources, like urban designers or landscape architects can lead these activities. Here are some exercises to consider:

- **Design charrette:** A design charrette is an intensive brainstorming and creative session that encourages participants to generate creative ideas and solutions for the place's future.
- **Storyboard:** Creating a visual story or sequence can illustrate how a solution or idea would work in practice. Participants can use this method to explore different scenarios and test the feasibility of different solutions.
- **Group sketch:** Participants can sketch out their ideas on paper or whiteboards and then share and build on each other's ideas.
- **Role play:** Use props and prototypes onsite to help ideation. This can also be more inclusive for different age groups and for participants less inclined to drawing or sketching.

It is essential to zero in on the most promising and feasible solutions. This process of prioritisation can help ensure that the final solutions align with the vision of the project and the needs of the community. Here are some methods that can help to identify the best ideas for further development and implementation:

- **Voting:** Participants vote on the ideas to determine which ones are the most popular.
- **Criteria-based evaluation:** Develop a set of criteria with the co-design collective participants that align with the goals of the project. Evaluate each idea against these criteria. The top ideas will be the ones that score the highest.
- **Group discussion:** Participants discuss the merits of each idea and decide which ones are the most promising.

Using data as part of the process

Data plays a critical role in shaping places. It can help to:

- Benchmark the performance and quality of a place before you start engagement;
- Involve participants in evidence-based conversations;
- Establish metrics or measurable goals for your project; and
- Measure the impact of pilots and temporary interventions delivered as part of the project against the goals set.

You should start by understanding the problem you are trying to solve, the data available on your place, and relevant the outcomes you are trying to achieve. For example, if your goal is to activate an area that is currently under used, or increase the opportunities for people to dwell in a place, you may want to find data to understand how many people pass through a place, and what their dwell times are. You may also want to gather data on the factors impacting dwell times, like ambient temperature and shade.

Here are some examples of datasets to explore:

- Data within your organisation;
- Open data;
- Closed publicly held data;
- Proprietary data; or
- Primary data (data you gather yourself, or with others. More information on this can be found on page 15).

The NSW Government [Data for Places](#) guide can support you in identifying and gathering the best data available to understand your place. Refer to [The right tool for the right task](#) for other tools that can be used for your analysis.

Once you have a strong understanding of the place, and have baseline data, you can use your co-design process to develop measurable goals and metrics for your project.

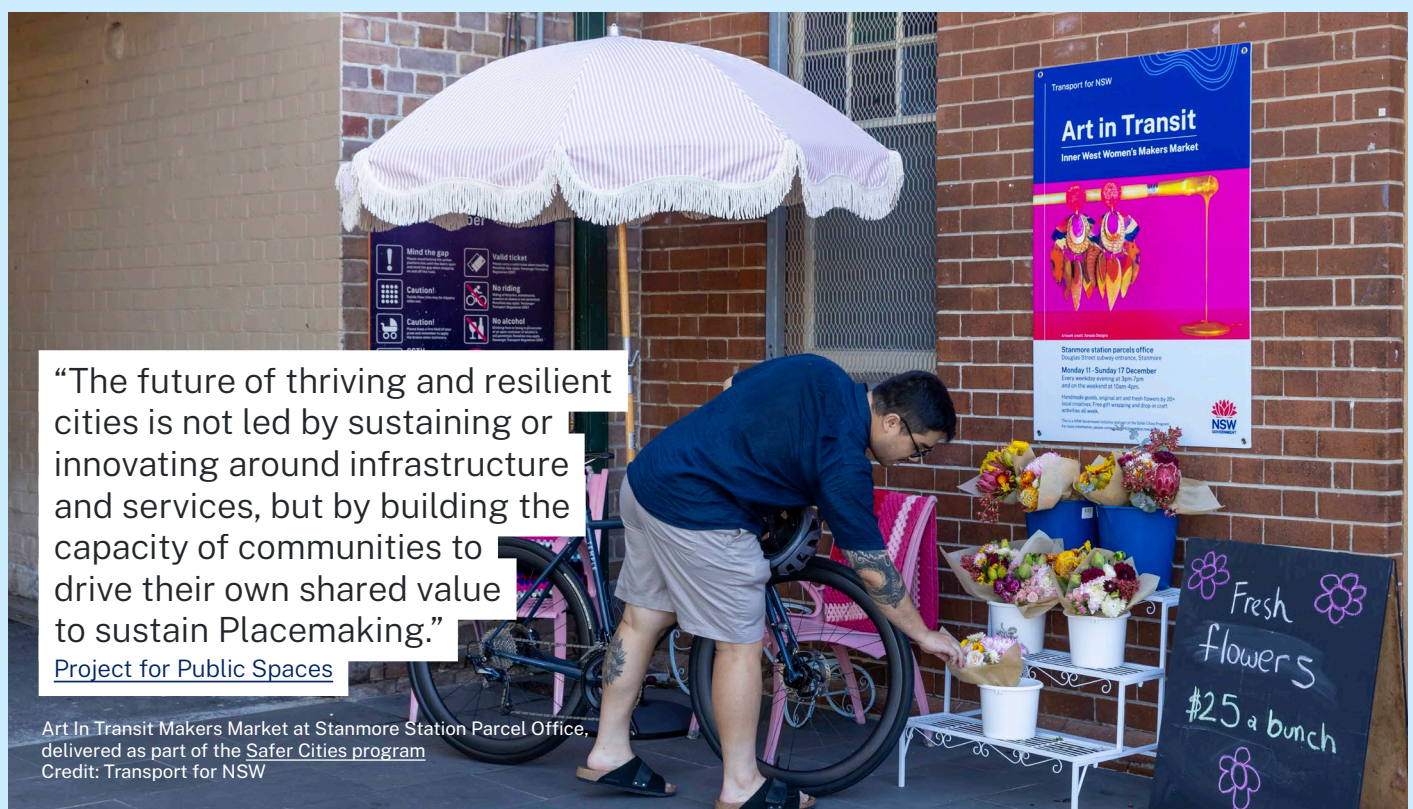
For example, your goals might be to:

- increase the number of people visiting the place by 10%;
- increase the average dwell time of people by 6 minutes; or to
- reduce the heat at street level by 3 degrees.

You can then align the data you need to measure these goals over time. If you have gathered suitably reliable baseline data, and established clear goals and metrics, you will be able to check the impact of your pilots and interventions as part of your project evaluation. This can help demonstrate the benefits of your placemaking activity and build a case for future investments.

Gathering primary data

Gathering and using primary data throughout the process of co-design can help build a shared understanding of the quality of the place you are focusing on. It can also help identify differences in perspectives and how the space is used.



“The future of thriving and resilient cities is not led by sustaining or innovating around infrastructure and services, but by building the capacity of communities to drive their own shared value to sustain Placemaking.”

[Project for Public Spaces](#)

Art In Transit Makers Market at Stanmore Station Parcel Office, delivered as part of the [Safer Cities program](#)
Credit: Transport for NSW

The quality of a place is reflected not only in its physical form — how it's designed, maintained and integrated with its environment — but also through the activities it supports and the meaning it holds. It can be evaluated by asking:

- Am I able to get there?
- Am I able to play and participate?
- Am I able to stay?
- Am I able to connect?

The [Evaluation Tool for Public Space for Public Life](#) helps identify positive attributes and areas for improvement. You can use this tool to gather data and use the findings in the co-design process.

As part of [Step 2B of the co-design process](#), ask your participants to evaluate the place using this tool at different times of the day and week. After collecting the data, input the scores into a spreadsheet to calculate combined scores.

Although the combined scores offer a general overview of how participants evaluate the place, they do not provide detailed information on how diverse user groups experience the place.

To develop more comprehensive solutions in the co-design process, it's important to explore the dataset in different ways to extract deeper insights. One way to do this is to segment the data and examine how different groups perceive the space based on factors such as age, gender, ability, cultural background, and time of day.

After analysing the data, prepare visualised graphs that can support the [‘Place Analysis’ workshop in Step 2C](#) of the co-design process. Here, the data can be used to draw further insights and inform analyses of the place.

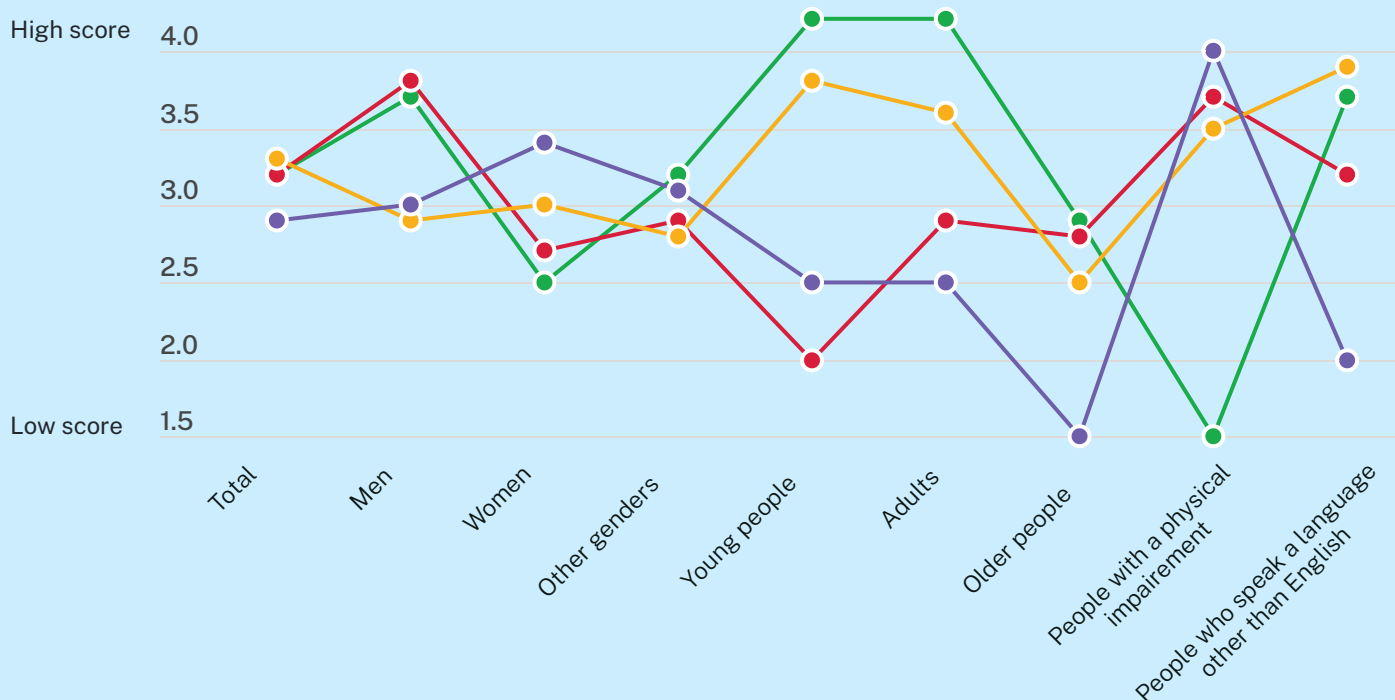
This can help the participants understand the data, share their observations and perspectives, identify why the space might work well for one user group and not for another, and gain a shared understanding of the place.

The example graph below shows that young people can easily access and connect in the place, but cannot play or participate. On the other hand, people with disability can play and participate, but have difficulty getting there.

These insights can guide the co-design collective in including activities for young people and making the place more accessible for disabled people. Similar analyses can be undertaken for each user group.

Other place evaluation or assessment tools that can be used include the [Healthy Streets Design Check](#), [Movement and Place Built Environment Indicators](#) and the [draft Community Survey Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#).

Example graph showing different ways to segment data gathered through the Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life



● Am I able to get there? ● Am I able to play and participate? ● Am I able to stay? ● Am I able to connect?

Step 4: Test and trial



Testing ideas in place and learning and refining along the way

Testing and evaluating the design solutions to ensure they meet the needs of users and align to the shared vision established in the previous step is crucial to co-design. It is critical at this stage that what we have learned in previous steps informs the actions or solutions that will be implemented. What have we learnt? What do these insights tell us?

The purpose of this step is to implement and refine the selected solution/s and identify any necessary adjustments to ensure the solution is effective, usable, and can meet a wide variety of needs in the context of your project. This step can also help you clearly establish the benefits of the changes and build the case for making those adjustments or for permanent change.

A. Test and trial your ideas in place

You have your selected solution/s and now it's time to think about testing them in place. This could mean implementing the solution directly. For example, if the participants have selected a series of events that celebrate the cultural diversity of the local area as their preferred solution, the next step could be planning when these events will take place. Some activities that you can do are:

- **Prototyping:** Participants can create physical or digital prototypes of their potential solutions. This might require more support and guidance from designers such as landscape architects or urban designers who are part of the group.
- **User testing:** This involves observing how users interact with the design solution in a controlled setting to identify any usability issues or areas for improvement. This can help gather comprehensive feedback on local issues.
- **Soliciting feedback:** Solicit feedback from users and stakeholders through surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather feedback on the design solution.
- **A/B testing:** Test variations of the design solution to see which performs better with users. These variations could be different scales or testing in different locations.

If you are going to involve community members outside of the participants, it is important to remember they may not always have the technical knowledge, resources or time required for prototyping, user testing, and providing feedback. However, their perspectives can be beneficial to the overall project.

In such cases, designers or members of the project team can take on these tasks and provide insights to the wider co-design collective. The feedback gathered can be used to refine the design. Ultimately, this iterative approach can lead to the successful implementation of the co-designed solution and can be as important as the solution itself.

B. Evaluate your ideas and iterate

Based on what you heard from testing and trialing, the design solution can be tweaked and adjusted to better meet the needs of users and stakeholders and to align to your shared vision. In this step, it is a good idea to revisit the early information you collected as a group, including your 'Place Analysis' as well as any 'how-might-we' questions you asked to compare and respond to what has changed since testing your solution/s.

Reviewing fresh data on the place can also help you establish whether you have achieved the outcomes you were seeking. This could include redoing the [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#). Refer to [pages 14-15](#) for more information on using data to establish baseline place performance and setting goals for your project.

C. Refine based on what you have learned

Once you have tested and evaluated your ideas, it is essential to engage in an ongoing process of observing and learning from users' interactions with it in the place. The aim is to ensure that the design solution remains effective and responsive to users' evolving needs over the long term.

This entails a continuous effort to collect data on user experience and changes to the place and how people interact with and use it through a range of activities or tools. This is part of the effective management of places and can help identify issues proactively. Testing and trialling can also highlight solutions that may be lighter, quicker and cheaper to implement, while also building the case for permanent change.

You can repeat activities from the previous steps like place evaluations, and introduce new activities like surveys or focus groups to gather feedback from people both within and outside of the collective. By continually learning and refining the design solution based on user input, it can be improved over time to better meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Co-design in a real project

Local example: Working with high school students to create a sense of welcome for FIFA Women's World Cup™ attendees at Moore Park transport hub precinct

To improve perceptions of safety at Moore Park transport hub precinct and to promote public transport and active transport as a method of travel to Moore Park, Transport for NSW and Greater Sydney Parklands aimed to deliver temporary lighting and wayfinding solutions during FIFA Women's World Cup™. As part of major event planning, there was expected to be a significant increase of families including women and girls travelling to the precinct as most games 'kicked off' in the evening.

Frame and find

The purpose of the project was to develop lighting and wayfinding solutions that created a sense of welcome and safety for all. The project focused on key active transport routes connecting Sydney Football Stadium to the Moore Park Light Rail stop and Central Station.

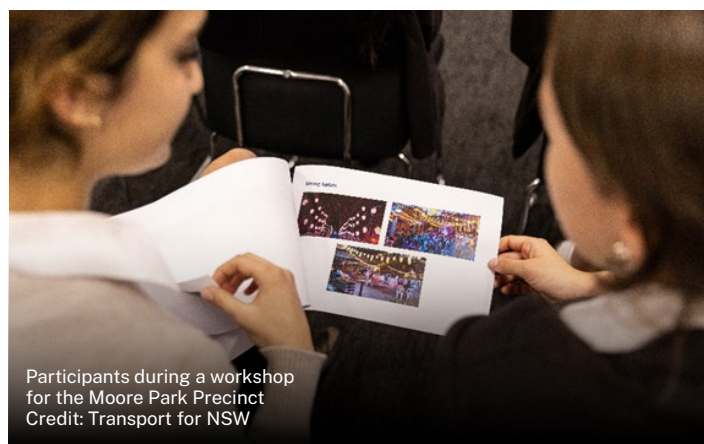
Over 6 weeks Transport for NSW worked with local high school students to create and test onsite lighting and wayfinding solutions to be put in place during the event. The high school students were selected to take part in the workshops because of the close proximity of their school to the Moore Park precinct; they were familiar with the precinct and passed through the area using public transport options and pedestrian and cycle paths regularly.

Examine and explore

The process involved 2 engagement sessions with local high school students, each consisting of a site walk followed by a workshop. The initial engagement session was held prior to the FIFA Women's World Cup™, to gain a baseline evaluation of the site, understand the participants' experiences in the space and their preferences for lighting types and wayfinding that could be used in the precinct. In both sessions, the Transport for NSW project team and Greater Sydney Parklands participated. The first session also involved the lighting designers who were going to design and implement the lighting installation.

For both sessions, participants were given a worksheet containing selected questions from the [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#) and the [draft Community Survey Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#).

Findings from the initial engagement session found that 94% of participants agreed that they feel safe in the space during the day, while 100% of participants stated that they do not feel safe in the space after dark.



Participants during a workshop for the Moore Park Precinct
Credit: Transport for NSW



Participants during a workshop for the Moore Park Precinct
Credit: Transport for NSW

Imagine and initiate

Given the specific parameters of the project, the project team also looked for other ways for the participants' needs and aspirations to be considered in Moore Park precinct's long-term future.

In the second session, the participants were introduced to the Moore Park East Landscape Plan and were taken through a series of activities to suggest and co-create ideas for their 'dream active play space' located near public transport options.

They were divided into two groups and instructed to visualise their ideal active recreation play space for teenagers. The participants wrote down the elements, as well as the look and feel of the play space, and worked with one another to compile a thorough list. Some of the common elements expressed by both groups were a variety of swings including large basket swings and a range of swing heights, multifunctional sports facilities, climbing equipment and better lighting and more.

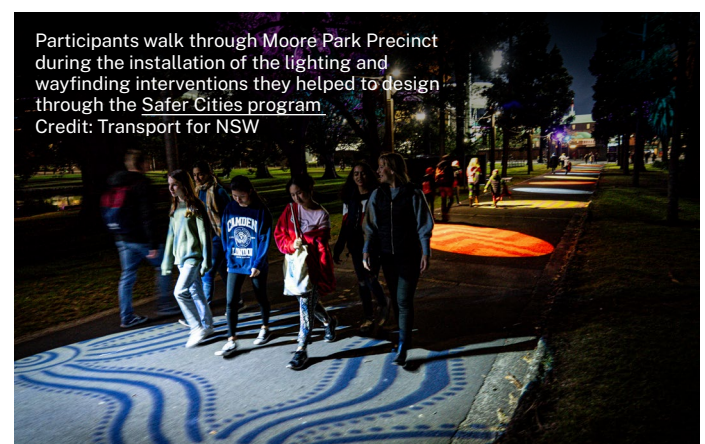
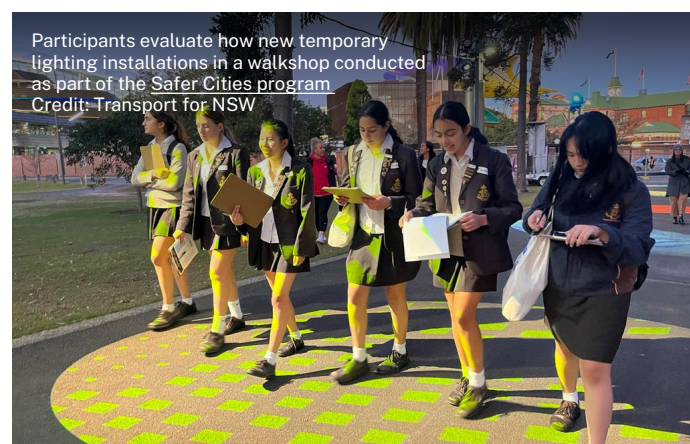
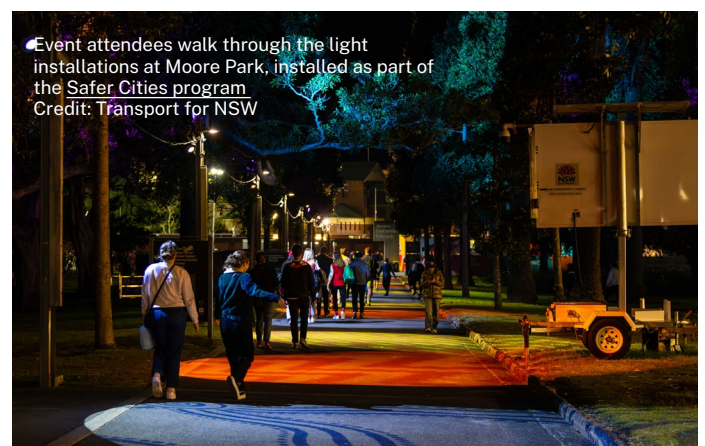
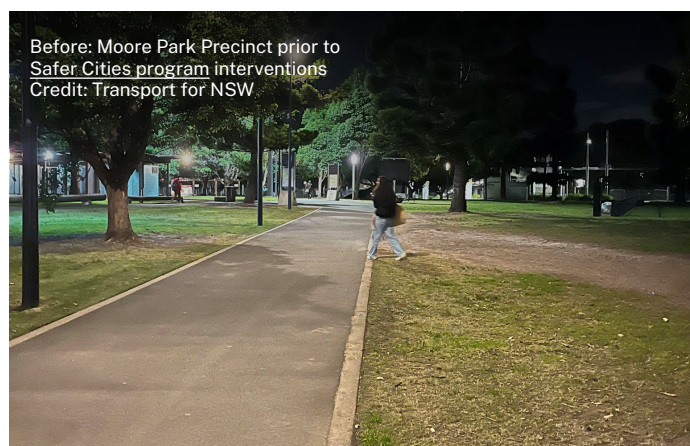
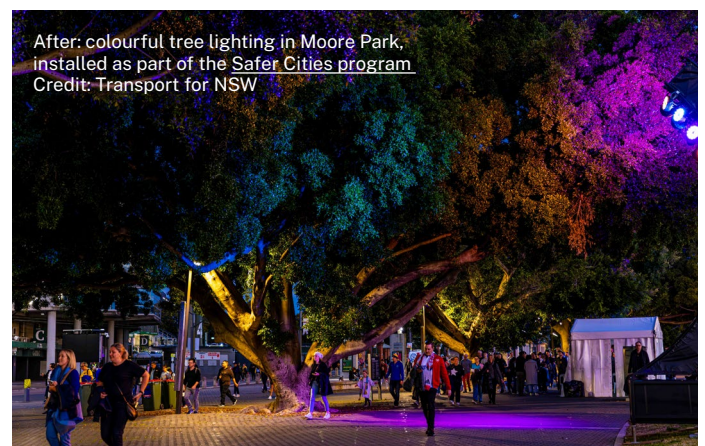
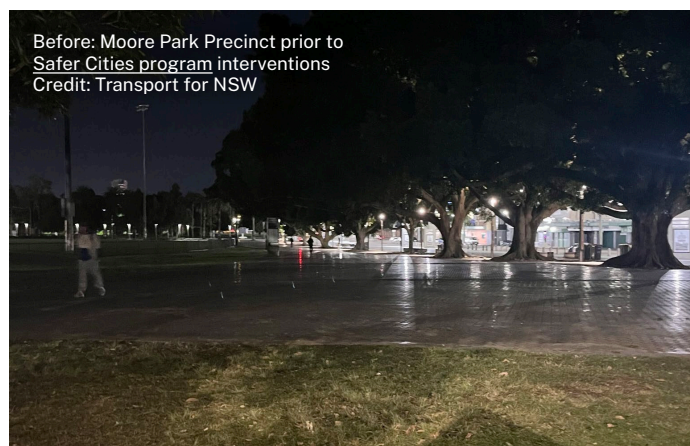
Test and trial

As the lighting and wayfinding interventions were installed, the participants were invited for an optional night-time walk through during an event day. A second engagement session, held during the FIFA Women's World Cup™, once the lighting and wayfinding interventions had been installed, aimed to evaluate the outcomes and impact of the lighting and wayfinding signage on making them feel safer.

The data gathered through the tools during the second workshop, post interventions showed that 100% of participants agreed that they feel safe in the space during the day. 80% of participants were neutral about their perceptions of safety after dark, and 20% stated that they feel unsafe after dark. This was an improvement from the initial engagement session where 100% of participants stated that they do not feel safe in the space after dark.

Across the precinct, participants noted a marked improvement in the following aspects in the Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life: feeling of safety at night, active surveillance in visible locations, lighting, clear sightlines and visibility, presence of positive social interactions and experiences, and that entrances, exits and signage are easy to find.

Overall, the participants enjoyed most of the lighting types installed, with the projected lighting on the ground and the tree lighting seen as a fun, novelty features. They also liked how the colouring of the lights and projections followed the FIFA Women's World Cup™ theme. However, participants highlighted the need for brighter lighting throughout the precinct to increase visibility and improve perceptions of safety.



Checklist: Is co-design right for my project?

Based on the principles identified in this resource, use the following checklist to assess whether or not your project is a good candidate for a co-design process.

Yes -1 No -0

Principle	Key question	Yes	No
Iteration	Do you have a long project time frame to run the co-design process (6-12 months)?		
	Do you have organisational support or approval to make shared decisions with the co-design collective?		
Inclusivity	Will you be able to incentivise and recruit a diverse group of participants that is demographically representative of your community and/or includes any relevant user groups?		
	Are the technical experts aware of the co-design principles, particularly understanding of the role of participants as "experts of their experience"?		
	Are you able to support people from all abilities and backgrounds to overcome barriers and participate in the process?		
	Are you able to incentivise the participants for their time and input into the co-design process?		
Curiosity	Would your project allow for issues to be defined and solutions to be developed by the co-design collective?		
Transparency	Are you clear on what is negotiable and what is non-negotiable?		
	Can you share data, decision-making processes and outcomes openly?		
	Have you factored in time for reporting back to the collective on the lessons learned from any test or trial implemented through the project?		
Empathy	Are you comfortable your facilitator/s will ensure those involved in the co-design will feel respected and included?		
	Will your selected activities support mutual listening and learning across the co-design collective?		
Immersion	Can you run the co-design process wholly or partly in the place/s?		
	Will there be opportunities, materials and skills provided to the co-design collective to prototype their ideas?		
Building capacity	If required, can you provide any support or training to participants to build their skills and knowledge of the process?		
	Can you provide support or training to internal staff to build their skills and knowledge of the process?		
Other things to consider	Are relevant internal and external stakeholders briefed and informed about the nature of a co-design process (the collective make the decisions together)?		
	Do you have the resources (time, money and staffing) to undertake a co-design process?		
	Do you have internal resources or are you able to access external resources that have the necessary expertise to help you implement your selected solution/s?		

If you get a score below 15 - Applying the whole process might not be right for this project. Consider how you can apply the principles and select activities that you would be able to incorporate in your project to engage with the community and gather insights.

If you got a score above 15 - Co-design could be a great option for this project. Go back and look at the criteria where you said 'no', and think about whether you can also modify your project approach to align with the principles of the co-design process.

Checklist: activities for your project

This checklist is a list of all the activities suggested in this guide. While this is not an exhaustive list of all the activities you could do in your project, use this list as a starting point to select and plan out what activities you can include and identify these in your engagement plan.

Examine and explore

- ❑ **Place evaluation:** Using tools like the [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#) to understand what is working well and what improvements can be made to a place.
- ❑ **User behaviour or observation:** Mapping and observing user behaviour in places to understand how different people use the space at different times of the day and week and identify areas for improvement. Identifying user profiles and daily journeys can also be a useful way of understanding how places are used on a daily basis, and for getting participants to think about how places are experienced in other people's shoes
- ❑ **Walkshops:** Conducting place-based and immersive walkshops (walking workshops) to gather insights on how the co-design collective participants use the place, how they feel when they use it, what's working well and what can be improved. Refer to [How to: Planning a walkshop on page 21](#) for more detail.
- ❑ **Qualitative methods:** Qualitative methods like mutual learning and story sharing can help to understand what people value about a place and what their pain points are. If any participant in the co-design process has experienced trauma related to the discussion topic, it is important to consider having a trained professional present to assist with the discussion and ensure that everyone feels comfortable and supported.
- ❑ **Place analysis:** Utilise the data and insights that have been collected to conduct a comprehensive Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the place in collaboration with the co-design collective or your project team. This analysis could be done as a group in a 'Place Analysis' workshop.
- ❑ **Themes:** Collate the findings of your research into themes or categories. These themes can point to specific ideas for the project or indicate areas of improvement that may have not been discussed prior to this process.

Imagine and initiate

- ❑ **Character words:** Offer a selection of descriptive words that convey the desired character of the place. Participants can choose the words that best align with their vision for the future.
- ❑ **Place images:** Present an assortment of images showcasing diverse places with unique elements. Participants can select the images that best represent their desired character for the place.
- ❑ **Design charrette:** A design charrette is an intensive brainstorming and creative session that encourages participants to generate creative ideas and solutions for the place's future.

- ❑ **Scenario planning:** This exercise involves creating a few plausible scenarios for the future of the place. Co-design collective participants can consider factors that could influence the place's future, such as changes in population demographics or emerging technologies.
- ❑ **Storyboarding:** This involves creating a visual story or sequence that illustrates how a solution or idea would work in practice. Participants can use this method to explore scenarios and test the feasibility of different solutions.
- ❑ **Group sketching:** Participants can sketch out their ideas on paper or whiteboards and then share and build on each other's ideas. This can help to generate new ideas and encourage collaboration and co-creation.
- ❑ **Role play:** Use props and prototypes onsite to help ideation. This can also be more inclusive for different age groups and for participants less inclined to drawing or sketching.
- ❑ **Voting:** Co-design collective participants can vote on their top ideas to determine which ones are the most popular.
- ❑ **Criteria-based evaluation:** Develop a set of criteria with the co-design collective participants that align with the goals of the project. Evaluate each idea against these criteria. The top ideas will be the ones that score the highest.
- ❑ **Group discussion:** The co-design collective can discuss the merits of each idea and decide which ones are the most promising.

Test and trial

- ❑ **Prototyping:** Co-design collective participants can create physical or digital prototypes of their potential solutions. This might require more support and guidance from designers and architects who are part of the co-design collective.
- ❑ **User testing:** This involves observing how users interact with the design solution in a controlled setting to identify any usability issues or areas for improvement.
- ❑ **Soliciting feedback:** Solicit feedback from users and stakeholders through surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather feedback on the design solution.
- ❑ **A/B testing:** Test variations of the design solution to see which performs better with users.
- ❑ **Surveys:** Conducting surveys with users to gather their thoughts and opinions on the place, design solution or providing a pathway for new users to provide feedback.
- ❑ **Focus groups:** Bringing together a group of users to discuss their experiences and gather feedback

How to: planning a walkshop

A place-based walking workshop, also known as a “walkshop,” is an interactive and experiential exercise where participants move around a public space or transport hub precinct, observe its environment and public life, and identify what is working well and ideas for improvement. To plan and run a successful walkshop, follow these steps:

Before the walkshop:

- ❑ **Define the purpose and objectives:** Clearly define the purpose and objectives of the walkshop. Consider what you want participants to learn, observe, or experience during the walkshop. Determine how many walkshops you want to have over the course of your project and for what purpose. If you decide to have multiple walkshops for different purposes, make sure you are clear on the purpose, objectives and structure of each one.
- ❑ **Choose the location and time:** Select a location that aligns with the walkshop's purpose and objectives. Consider factors such as weather conditions, accessibility, safety, and the potential to explore various themes or topics. Determine the optimal timing for the walkshop, and whether participants should undertake it multiple times to observe how the place functions across different times of the day or week.
- ❑ **Select a facilitator:** Choose an experienced facilitator who can design and lead walkshops or similar activities, and who can engage participants in a meaningful way.
- ❑ **Recruit participants:** If the walkshop is part of a wider co-design process, use the same participants as your co-design collective. Otherwise, use a third-party agency or market research firm to recruit participants. Provide them with details about the walkshop, including the date, time, location, including clear instructions for the meeting and ending of the walkshop, and incentives, if applicable. Consider who from your project team should be present at the walkshop.
- ❑ **Plan the route:** The route should take participants to essential sites, landmarks, or features. Ensure that the route and location are safe for participants, and plan for breaks, rest stops, and opportunities for participants to interact with the environment and with each other.
- ❑ **Design the walkshop:** You can collect feedback and insights from participants through a variety of ways: using worksheets, voice recording, taking notes, or a mix of all of these methods. Use a combination of methods to provide a meaningful experience for the participants while gathering insights and data. This can also reduce potential barriers to participation. For example, a participant may not feel adept at expressing their thoughts in written form and feel more comfortable expressing themselves verbally. Use tools such as the [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#) to evaluate the place. You can also develop bespoke activity sheets.

Prepare a clear line of questioning that will run across the whole walkshop, as well as particular place-based questions for each stop. Make sure there is sufficient time for participants to share their thoughts. Consider having a dedicated open discussion during the walkshop or at the end.

- ❑ **Prepare materials:** Print materials such as maps, guides, handouts, and other visual aids that will support the walkshop. The [Evaluation Tool for Public Space for Public Life](#) can help you undertake a place evaluation to understand what is working well and what improvements can be made to a place. Prepare a run sheet for internal purposes that outlines the details of the walkshop. This should include the stops you intend to make, how much time you intend to spend at each stop and what place-based questions you will ask. Send a reminder to your participants of the location, time and if you need them to bring materials. Consider if they need to bring weather protection.
- ❑ **Conduct a run-through:** Conduct a run-through of the workshop activities, including audio-visual equipment and presentations, to ensure that everything runs smoothly.

On the day of the walkshop:

- ❑ **Begin the walkshop:** Arrive at the walkshop meeting location at least 15 minutes before the start time, with clear signage to help participants find you. Provide participants with all the materials they need for the walkshop and provide a briefing on the walkshop purpose and agenda, and any additional tips on what to observe.
- ❑ **Conduct the walkshop:** Guide participants along the route, pausing at pre-determined stops to conduct exercises and group discussions. After completing the walkshop, collect all the material from participants to capture the data and insights they've recorded.

After the walkshop:

- ❑ **Follow up:** After the walkshop, follow up with participants to provide any additional resources or support that may be needed. If you are able to, it is recommended to report back to the participants how you have collated and summarised the findings of the walkshop and how you will use this information in the next steps of the program. Provide participants with an opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback, or share their experiences.
- ❑ **Evaluate and refine:** Debrief with your team and with your participants on the outcomes of your walkshop. Identify points for improvement and key lessons learned for future walkshops and for the rest of your project process.

Shaping places together: Ideas for co-designing places

Draft for consultation

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