

Public Life Program

Call for 2020 Projects

EXTENDED Deadline: May 1, 2020



In 2020, SDOT's Public Life Program seeks to collaborate with an existing City project to develop a Public Life Action Plan that will complement and strengthen the design of a capital project.

Our approach to how we design the public realm can make or break our success as a livable city. Learning more about what draws people into a public space and encourages them to linger is critical.

The Public Life Data Protocol was created in 2017 and is recognized as the international standard for assessing public life behavior. We have operationalized this approach in our own work because we see this cost benefit tool as a smart way to guide pedestrian realm investments. We want to work more closely with City staff to apply these methods to inform how public investments should be leveraged to enhance the experience of public space users in the future.

This Public Life Action Plan will follow the framework we developed in 2019, which uses a data-informed approach to guide public space investments at a district or sub-area level.

This user centered approach collects information about how space is currently used (or not), how the space currently meets the fundamental needs of people in public space, and the perceptions of people who use the space.

We want to work with you to collect this data and bring it to life to enhance your project for current and future users of the public space!

What is public life?

The Gehl Institute defines public life as the “activity that takes place in everyday public spaces—on streets, in parks and plazas, and in spaces between buildings.”

What is a public life study?

A public life study is a type of research conducted through observational methods that focuses on measuring human activity and characterizing how public space is used by people moving through or staying still within a specific study area. A public life study provides insight into how design, activation, social behavior, built environment, and urban form all influence activity in public space. A better understanding of those factors directly supports our efforts to make public spaces that people enjoy using.

A public life study typically answers one or more of the following questions about public spaces:

- **How many** people are there, either staying still or moving through?
- **Who** is there, by gender, age, etc.?
- **Where** are people lingering?
- **What** activities are people engaging in?

Learn more about the Public Life Program here:

<https://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/urban-design-program/public-life-program>



How will my project benefit?

Having 'people data' to drive pedestrian realm investments.

You can learn a lot about how to unlock the potential of a public space by simply observing who uses it and how. We will collect this data and conduct an urban design assessment of the site to develop targeted public space recommendations. Sometimes, minor levels of investment in the right place can be the catalyst for positive change.

Engage the community to be part of the data collection.

This is an excellent inclusion to any community engagement plan! Showing your commitment to learn more about the neighborhood in which you are working goes a long way to gaining support for your project. It also engages volunteers more deeply in the project itself by empowering them to be experts in how the space functions.

Bolster your case for more funding for your project.

Having a proposal that is backed up in public life data can be very compelling. In our work in Pioneer Square, we found that having a data-informed approach helped us secure more funding and organize stakeholders around desired outcomes identified through the process.

How will this work?

We are here to be your partner and deliver the Public Life Action Plan in a timely manner to ensure the recommendations see their way into the future design. Over the course of a couple months, we will work with you to identify key areas to study. We will then work with you to mobilize volunteers to collect data on how people experience the space, how well the current design is utilized, and opportunities for improving outcomes for current users and for people the space is not yet serving. For this, we will undertake a mixed methods approach, including observation of social and physical realms, surveys with public space users, and focus groups with stakeholders. We will then summarize the data and identify key recommendations to ensure positive public life outcomes for the project. We will then work with you to identify what tactical actions can be taken to realize these recommendations in your project.

What kind of project is a good fit for a Public Life Action Plan?

When deciding if a project is a good fit for a Public Life Action Plan, we ask the following questions to ensure the plan will be used to shape investment decisions and that these investments occur in appropriate locations that have potential high impact on the public.

Capital Funding

- Are there projects in the vicinity that already have funding allocated?
- Is the project not yet fully scoped? Is there still room for public life data to inform design?

Conducive Land Use

- Is the project in a dense, walkable, commercial/mixed use area?

Equity

- Is the project located in a historically underserved community?
- Does it have a potential to have a relatively high impact on vulnerable constituencies, like people of color, youth, or elderly?

Demonstrated Community Interest

- Is there an opportunity to partner on data collection and mobilize enthusiasm in the community?

If we receive interest from multiple project teams, we will select the project that most strongly aligns with these key criteria that make for a successful Public Life Action Plan.

If you have an idea for a Public Life Study, please submit a proposal to:
SDOTPublicLife@seattle.gov

We will set up a meeting to discuss your project to see if it's a good fit for a Public Life Action Plan.
Please reach out by May 1, 2020.