
Reimagining
the Civic Commons

How to use the Observation Map

Observation Map

The observation map is a quick and easy way to collect data on who is visiting your site and what they are doing. It provides data on public life, mixing on site, and safety, three signals that indicate how a site is benefiting a city or highlight opportunities to make investments.

You can customize the observation map for your site, using these categories as a guide to help you select the metrics to include.

The metrics are divided into three categories:

KEY

These are core metrics that can help understand the impact of public places in our communities.

We recommend always collecting these metrics.

They are outlined in bold in the observation map tool for visual clarity.

ADDITIONAL

These metrics expand on what can be learned from the observation map tool. We recommend including them in any mapping efforts. To determine if you should collect these, consider the following questions:

- Will having this information inform your decisions?
- Do you have the time to collect the data?
- Do you have the capacity to analyze the data?

CUSTOM

There is room on the worksheet for metrics that you define. To design custom metrics, consider the following questions:

- Is there additional information on your users' behavior that will inform your decisions?
- Do you have the time to collect the additional data?
- Do you have the capacity to analyze the additional data?

Data Collection Tips

- 1. Collect data on a weekday and on a weekend day.** Most sites attract different types and numbers of people during the week and over the weekend.
- 2. Select days when you believe the site will host a typical sample of visitors.** Do not select days when unusual events might either draw people to or away from the site.
- 3. Start your data collection early enough to capture morning users, and end your data collection late enough to capture evening users.** For a busy site, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. is a common timeframe. For a less busy site, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. might work. Decide based on your knowledge of when people are out in the neighborhood on weekdays and weekends. Don't cut off your data collection when there will still be a significant number of users!
- 4. Add a map to the worksheet and draw very clear borders around your site.** If your site's borders are not clear, data collectors will not know whether to count people near the edges. For example, without clear borders, different data collectors may make different decisions about whether to count people on an adjacent sidewalk. This will make the resulting data inaccurate.
- 5. Count hourly.** It's best to perform counts once an hour throughout the day. If the site has very few visitors, collecting data every other hour may be sufficient.
- 6. Do not count throughout the entire hour.** The biggest mistake data collectors have made in the past is to count every person who comes into the site over an entire hour. Emphasize that each time they fill out a worksheet, they should record a snapshot of who is in the site at that moment – and only that moment. Once they record a snapshot, they are done until the next scheduled data collection time.
- 7. Start a new worksheet every hour.** Each time data is collected, the data collectors should use a new worksheet to capture what is happening at the site in that moment.
- 8. Review the observation map and instructions with your data collectors before they go out in the field.** Make sure they practice mapping and understand data collection protocols.

What to Provide to Data Collectors

- **A worksheet for every hourly count they will conduct** that shift, with a map of the site with borders so they know where to observe.
- **A uniform shirt, hat, and/or nametag.** If surveyors are in uniform, people will trust them more and surveyors will feel more comfortable observing.
- **Language for what to say in case people approach them**, including information about the purpose of the observation map and who is organizing it.
- **Information on the organization(s)** they are performing the data collection for, in case people ask.
- **Emergency contact information** in case something happens or they cannot make their shift.
- **The location of a restroom** they can use during their shift.

How to Analyze Data

1. **Open the Observation Map Analysis Spreadsheet**
2. **In the first tab, titled “ENTER RAW DATA HERE”**
 - Each row represents a data collection time. The spreadsheet contains most times you might gather data. If you did not gather data for a particular period, leave it blank.
 - There is a column for every data point you could have collected. If you did not collect a particular data point, leave it blank.
 - There are additional columns to the right for custom metrics. Feel free to edit the titles of these columns to match your metrics.
 - Statistics will automatically generate at the bottom of the sheet.
3. **Charts will automatically generate on the second tab.** Be sure to enter data into the first tab correctly, or tables will not generate correctly.
 - For the charts showing hourly visitorship to the sites, you may want to edit the Y axes on both charts so that the maximum values are the same. This way the two charts will appear comparable.
4. **If you make any custom metrics**, you will have to produce charts for them yourself. Without knowing the content of the custom metrics, we could not produce automatic charts.
5. **You can see an example of data entry and analysis in the Observation Map Data Analysis Example**