

A New Way of Working for Cities

Reimagining the Civic Commons is a national initiative to foster engagement, equity, environmental sustainability and economic development in our cities by revitalizing and connecting public places such as parks, plazas, trails and libraries.

As we advance a vision for renewed and connected urban public places, we are also reinventing how communities manage public assets. Central to our belief is that our shared public places, when revitalized and connected, have the power to influence positive social outcomes. Based on this, we are working with teams on the ground to design, manage and operate a portfolio of civic assets guided by a set of core principles.

Principles of Reimagining the Civic Commons

- **Design, manage and operate** civic assets as a portfolio, focused on influencing social outcomes of civic engagement, socioeconomic mixing, environmental sustainability and value creation
- **Bring people of all backgrounds** back into public life, where trust can be formed
- **Generate stewards and advocates** for the assets that shifts the behavior of citizens from consumers to producers
- **Provide the best quality for all** and can compete with alternatives in the private market
- **Welcome everyone and create opportunities** for shared experience among people of all incomes and backgrounds
- **Increase access to nature** for residents and invites visitorship via walking, biking or transit
- **Provide ecological benefits** to the surrounding neighborhood
- **Attract additional investment** in the surrounding neighborhood to create tax revenue to support the assets in a way that serves longtime residents

“This is about rethinking how we see our civic assets and engaging the communities that surround them in creating a vision of what their neighborhoods could look like in the future. It’s not just about making something beautiful aesthetically — it’s about bringing people out and bringing people together.”

- Kathryn Ott Lovell,
COMMISSIONER,
PHILADELPHIA PARKS AND RECREATION

Reimagining
the Civic Commons

Why Now?

As communities have segmented by income, technology has advanced and priorities have shifted, support for civic assets has declined. Due to underinvestment and apathy, our civic assets are no longer providing the connective tissue that binds us together and anchors neighborhoods. The result is more than overgrown fields and lackluster libraries: research shows that Americans spend less time together in social settings, trust each other less and interact less with others whose experiences are different.



Just 32% of people believe most people can be trusted

From 1970 to 2012, the percent of people living in predominantly poor or affluent neighborhoods rose from 15% to 31%

How to Create Public Places that Serve Today's Cities



- A** Eliminate siloes: design, program and manage a seamless civic commons.
- B** Go beyond events. Focus on everyday moments for people of all backgrounds to live their lives in public, together.
- C** Expand the role of community members. They're more than customers—they're co-creators.
- D** Forget the status quo. Pursue high-quality design and programming.
- E** Don't just serve existing users. Welcome a diverse mix of people.
- F** Prioritize pedestrians, bicyclists and those arriving by transit.
- G** Make every asset work double time by incorporating green infrastructure solutions.
- H** Consider the neighborhood. Pursue strategies that revitalize local communities—attracting new investment while benefiting existing residents.
- I** Measure outcomes that matter. Books in circulation and acres mowed are not meaningful to communities.