



# The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit

Projects that inspire change — and improve communities for people of all ages

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PROTECTED BIKE LANES



OUTDOOR SEATING



POP-UP SHOPS



PUBLIC ART ... AND MORE!

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**Team Better Block** is a consulting firm that has pioneered new models for planning and designing public spaces, streets and other community assets. With more than 200 projects in the United States and internationally, Team Better Block works in communities of all sizes and demographics to build the momentum for long-term change through short-term pop-up demonstration projects. Co-founder Andrew Howard transitioned from the traditional design-and-defend planning process to the experiential, pop-up model after he and some neighbors in Dallas, Texas, built the first “better block.” (Learn more about that on page 15.) Seeing a new way to move policy and infrastructure projects forward, Howard created a process that engages the community through active, on-site participation. In recognition of his influence in shaping the built environment and advancing positive social outcomes, Howard was awarded a 2015 Loeb Fellowship for urban planning and design by the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

**THE POP-UP PLACEMAKING TOOL KIT**

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## INTRODUCTION

The most successful pop-up placemaking demonstrations put people at the forefront of creating change in their community.

When residents help identify and solve the challenges that affect their daily lives — whether it’s a half-vacant Main Street or roads that make walking or bicycling unsafe — communities and local leaders are more likely to achieve and sustain success. When communities of all types (urban, suburban, rural) and sizes experiment and demonstrate solutions, the quicker their methods can be refined and positive change achieved.

AARP Livable Communities and Team Better Block have partnered on numerous demonstration projects in support of communities that want to become more livable and age-friendly.

This tool kit stems from Team Better Block’s on-the-ground experience and lessons learned, yet it is not a prescription for how a demonstration or change must be implemented.

Community leaders, organizations and residents are encouraged to use this publication and Team Better Block’s pop-up recipe catalog (see page 23) as a starting point.

As with any recipe, the ingredients can be substituted as needed and customized to taste. If your community cooks up any of our recipes or some of its own to become more welcoming, usable, age-friendly and livable for people of *all* ages, please let us know. AARP and Team Better Block can be reached via the email addresses at left. ■

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## PLACEMAKING DEFINED

The term “placemaking” refers to the work of improving a particular public space or overall area to make it more of a destination and shared gathering place.

**The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit** was created to inform a broad audience of local leaders, policymakers, advocates and neighborhood residents about the many ways temporary projects can inspire positive community change.







# What Is a Pop-Up Demonstration?

Pop-up demonstration projects — also known as “tactical urbanism,” “do-it-yourself urbanism” or “better blocks” — typically involve community members working together to bring attention to overlooked spaces, address neighborhood issues, or demonstrate desired improvements within a public or sometimes private space such as a vacant building or underused lot.

This can be done through a rapid prototyping process — a “pop-up demonstration” — that uses lighter, cheaper, easily available materials to build interventions that temporarily improve a space.

By seeing and doing, local leaders and residents can propel positive community change. After all, when it’s possible to illustrate a new idea through a temporary installation or demonstration, a proposed enhancement is better understood, supported and achieved.

Pop-up projects can be organized and implemented quickly or over time. The demonstrations can take many forms (see the box at right). And there are many ways a pop-up project can help solve common problems, such as stagnant economic activity, dangerously designed streets or a lack of community involvement.

◀ **BETHEL, VERMONT: A weekend better block transformation made Main Street pop with temporary stores, crosswalks, sidewalk seating and a “Blue Lane” for nonmotorized methods of getting around. The accompanying signage explained that the lane was open to bicycles, strollers, wheelchairs and horses — as well as “dancers ... flying carpets ... and cartwheelers.” Learn more about “Bethel Better Block” on page 20.**

## THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF DEMONSTRATIONS

### Traffic Calming

A roadway’s design impacts the speed and flow of the vehicles that travel along it. To reduce speeds and increase safety for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists, the design often needs to change.

A pop-up demonstration can show a community that it’s possible for street to be both safe and efficient. A traffic calming pop-up project might use hay bales or plastic bollards to create a temporary roundabout or protected bike lane.

### Connectivity

In placemaking, connectivity refers to how people access and move between the places they need or want to go. Where there are no marked crosswalks, colorful paint can create a visible, designated pathway where drivers stop and pedestrians proceed.

### Public Spaces

People need places to gather — or at least spend a bit of time in a space other than their own homes or yards. A pop-up “parklet” or small “pocket park” with seating can be easily installed in a parking spot or on a vacant plot. Creating environments that encourage social interaction can improve community cohesion.

### Programming

A pop-up demonstration isn’t effective if community members don’t see or engage with it. Music, food, games and giveaways are among the many ways to attract attention and build community support.



# Why Do a Pop-Up Demonstration?



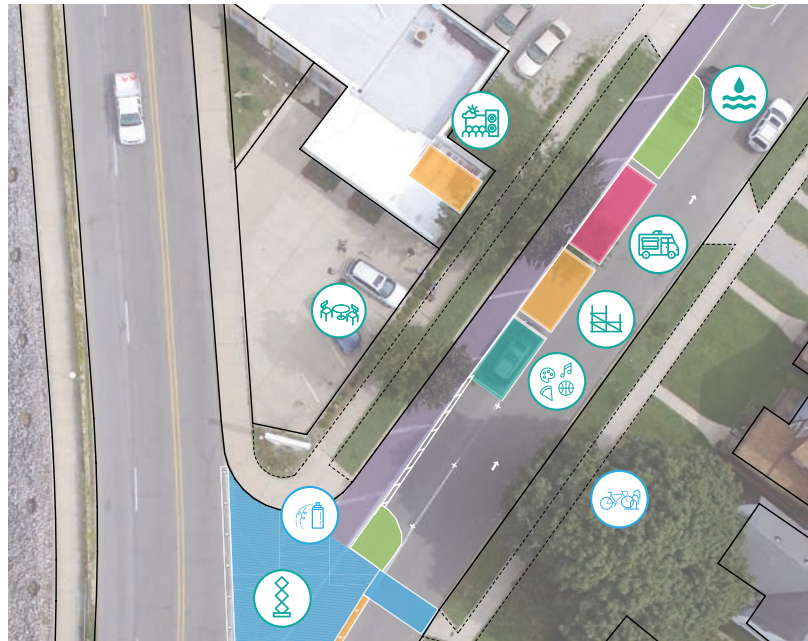
▲ **BEFORE:** Columbia Avenue Plaza, Fort Wayne, Indiana

The pop-up process can be used to address local issues that, when resolved, will make a community more livable and age-friendly for all residents.

For the demonstration to be effective, its organizers need to define *why* a pop-up project is being done. Maybe there's a specific concern, such as a need for more or better bike lanes or a desire to make use of a particular building. However, the answer rarely involves solving a single problem.

A goal of this tool kit is to empower communities to reclaim and value their public spaces. That's why having residents lead the demonstration is just as important as the demonstration itself.

Pop-up projects inspire action, foster community identity and perpetuate the sorts of activities and improvements that make a street, neighborhood, town or city a better place to live, work and play.



▲ **PROPOSED:** The goal was to create a safe, usable space.



▲ **AFTER:** A few dozen cans of paint later (one gallon covers about 400 square feet), Columbia Avenue featured a bike lane, crosswalk, seating and a supply of yellow swim noodles, which served as attention-getters for passersby and soft weaponry for mock battles.



## REASONS TO DO A POP-UP DEMONSTRATION

- To Test New Ideas**  
Infrastructure projects are complicated and costly. Before diving into a full-fledged construction project, it makes sense to pilot innovative ideas to determine the best solution.
- To Encourage Community Involvement**  
A sense of community and belonging can be hard to achieve when there's no place for residents to gather. It's hard for neighbors to know one another when their primary interaction is by waving at each other from their moving cars. A pop-up project attracts and involves people and can serve as an open invitation to people of all ages to pop in for a visit.
- To Make the Case for Public Support**  
Often, opportunities for change appeal to community members but prove difficult to implement. Barriers might include restrictive zoning codes or a lack of financing and interest by government officials and other local leaders. A pop-up demonstration can raise awareness about a need and inspire residents and officials to pursue solutions.
- To Strengthen the Local Economy**  
As traditional economic development models shift from attracting outside corporations to fostering local entrepreneurship, pop-ups provide a way to highlight and energize nascent makers' spaces, small business incubators, and local artisans and restaurateurs.
- To Manage Reinvention and Growth**  
The rapid redevelopment of a neighborhood can displace established businesses and residents. Pop-up demonstrations can be used to strengthen and integrate existing community leaders, residents and businesses into new investment activities.
- To Engage New Residents**  
Demographic changes and employment trends result in people moving into and out of communities. Pop-up projects and events are a useful way to integrate and engage new neighbors.
- To Accelerate Decision-Making**  
It's easy to become overwhelmed by the work, costs and possible pushback encountered when advocating for community change. Overthinking and overanalyzing a situation can slow the decision-making process and overall progress. The value of a pop-up demonstration is that it's not permanent. So decisions can be made faster, ideas can be tested, and mistakes can be made and corrected. Whatever happens, lessons will be learned so improvements can move forward.
- To Inspire Change**  
The ultimate goal is for a pop-up project's demonstrated benefits to become permanent features that improve the community. (Two such success stories are on page 20.)

.....

**“Communities build powerful connections around the shared experience of ‘making’ a vision for the future together.”** — Team Better Block



# How to Do a Pop-Up Demonstration

## THE STEPS

The Team Better Block method involves a 90-day implementation strategy. Such a schedule typically provides enough time for an individual or community group to plan and execute a pop-up demonstration without talking themselves out of doing one.

- 1 SELECT A LOCATION
- 2 ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY
- 3 MAKE A PLAN
- 4 DETERMINE AN APPROACH AND BUDGET — AND FOLLOW THE RULES
- 5 GET TO WORK!
- 6 HOST AN EVENT
- 7 MAKE IT PERMANENT

## PRO TIP: Use “Placemaking Triangulation”

In a public space, the choice and arrangement of different elements in relation to one another puts the “activation process” in motion.

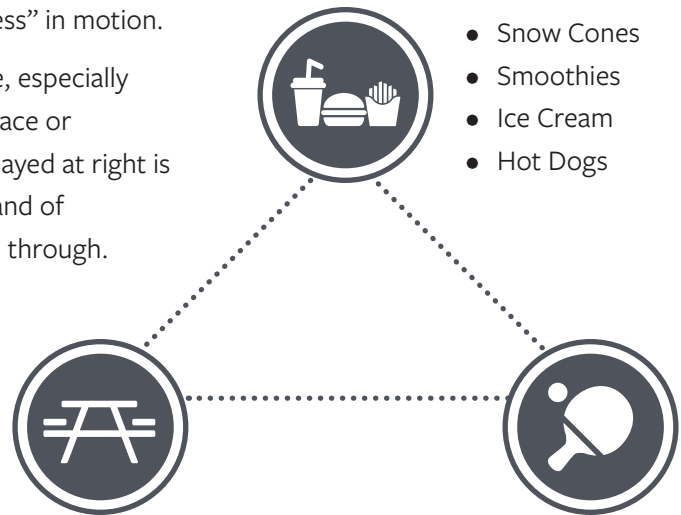
An effective pop-up project is usable and interactive, especially when the project involves the creation of a place, space or destination. A location with the three elements displayed at right is said to be “sticky.” Sticky places are destinations in and of themselves, not simply locations to pass by or travel through.

Such spaces provide:

- Comfortable, well-maintained, conveniently located seating that’s usable by people of different ages, sizes and abilities
- Food, beverages and, ideally, distinctive treats
- Enjoyable activities and attractions that give people a reason to visit a place — and return

### THINGS TO EAT AND DRINK

- Food Trucks
- Snow Cones
- Smoothies
- Ice Cream
- Hot Dogs



### A PLACE TO SIT

- Café-Style Seating
- Picnic Tables
- Benches
- Shade Sails or Umbrellas

### THINGS TO SEE AND DO

- Games
- Artwork
- Entertainment



▲ COLUMBUS, OHIO: A basketball court in the Blackburn neighborhood was transformed into a destination by the use of lively colors, signage, seating, ping-pong (the table is visible in the upper left) and court lights for night games.



▲ BETHEL, VERMONT: The space provided by two parking spots was room enough for both a pop-up taco bar and a dining area. The food stand generated \$900 in revenue during the three-day event.



▲ BETHEL, VERMONT: People of all ages rode along the “Blue Lane,” a protected multimodal pathway that was created with blue paint and straw-filled wattles.



▲ AKRON, OHIO: Seating comes in many styles and can serve dual purposes, as the covered hay bales did in this pop-up garden that included a tented performance stage.



# 1 Select a Location

## Pop-up demonstrations can happen in a variety of places and spaces



### MAIN STREETS

Whether or not the main street in a community's downtown is actually called Main Street, this type of central corridor is a vital element of a town or city's public space. The main roadway in a downtown is a place where people work, shop and socialize. It's also a route used by pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and vehicles of every size. Successful pop-up demonstrations on a Main Street fit the appearance and character of the area and influence the quality of life and economic health of the community.



### NEIGHBORHOODS

Pop-up projects in residential neighborhoods tend to focus on turning low-density communities into sustainable, mixed-use spaces that minimize sprawl and reduce the dependence on cars. Demonstrations can show how a residential area can be enhanced through altered transit patterns, rezoning to allow mixed uses (such as a corner café), the creative repurposing of buildings or the addition of crosswalks or bike lanes to make streets safer for all users.



### PARKS AND PLAZAS

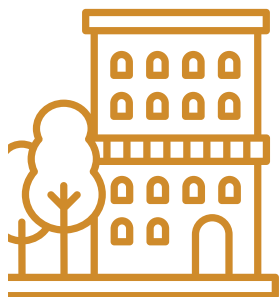
Pop-up demonstrations in parks, plazas and green spaces can show how existing public areas can be revamped to bring new vitality to the location and the community. When working in these places, pop-up organizers need to consider the space from the perspective of both current and potential users.



### OTHER TYPES OF PLACES

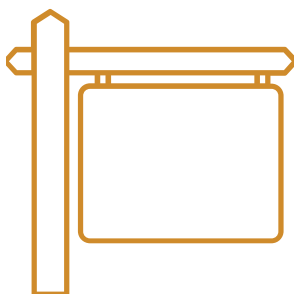
Communities are sometimes challenged by problems that don't fit into a single category. Pop-up demonstrations are helpful when trying to address underperforming industrial or business parks, abandoned big-box stores, worn-out strip malls, or failing shopping centers.

**PRO TIP:** These conditions can set up a project and location for success



**STREETSCAPES**

Streets that are lined with buildings and (ideally) sidewalks are the type of defined, often pedestrian-friendly spaces that make a good pop-up demonstration setting.



**AVAILABILITY**

Buildings with street-level vacancies are perfect spots for launching temporary shops and eateries. If the businesses prove popular, they might turn into permanent tenants.



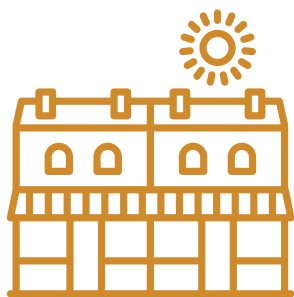
**ADJACENCY**

A location that's accessible from nearby neighborhoods and is near public buildings and spaces has the potential to become a popular destination.



**RESIDENT SUPPORT**

Pop-ups really *pop* when local leaders, neighborhood groups and a range of community supporters participate and brainstorm about opportunities for change.



**CHARACTER**

People like to spend time in places that are unique and appealing. Locations that feature eye-catching buildings or meaningful landmarks are super spots for pop-ups.



**BUSINESS BUY-IN**

Pop-up projects and permanent changes are most successful when local stakeholders, such as business owners, support and contribute to community improvement efforts.



# 2

## Engage the Community

Placemaking is a team effort. The most successful short- and long-term projects are moved along or led by residents. Change that's developed and enacted by a local government alone might not gain the needed community-wide support. Building a community-based planning and implementation team improves the chances of residents' diverse interests being represented and a project being completed.

### EFFECTIVE POP-UP DEMONSTRATION TEAMS INCLUDE:



#### THE CHAMPION

A natural leader and advocate for getting work done (and done well) in the community, the Champion knows how to bring people together behind a shared cause and vision.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



#### THE PLANNER

Someone needs to keep all the balls in the air. That person will infuse the pop-up preparations with structure and organization. Attention to detail and the ability to multitask and make decisions are key. The Planner can serve as the project leader or co-leader, or as an administrator who manages the logistics.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



#### THE ENTREPRENEUR

People who are entrepreneurial and have business smarts can assess ideas and put them into action. Such individuals often have the financial means to start their own businesses. If they don't, they likely know how to access funding and make use of their social capital. The Entrepreneur is typically a risk-taker who's able to create a product or service to fit the local market.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



▲ PINELLAS PARK, FLORIDA: A pre-pop-up walk-and-talk takes community volunteers on a neighborhood tour.



### THE DESIGNER

Someone must focus on how the project space will look and, perhaps, be furnished. A design professional would be great, but the Designer might just be someone who has a good eye for design and decorating without the formal credentials.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



### THE ARTIST

Creative people can see a painting on a blank wall. They can then create what they've seen in their mind's eye. The Artist role can be filled by an individual or a multitalented team. Artists of many types (visual, musical, theatrical) and specialties (painting, sculpture, graphic design) are key to any pop-up project.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



### THE HANDYPERSON

Pop-up projects need at least one person who has construction and assembly skills. This Handyman is typically so capable and versatile that he or she can make almost anything out of most any material — and likely has the tools and equipment the project will need.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



### THE PROMOTER

The pop-up project will need a marketer and spokesperson who can speak about different topics with different audiences. The Promoter is social media savvy, has connections to the right people and makes everyone feel welcome.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## PRO TIP: Host a Community Walk-and-Talk

Staging a walking tour before a demonstration event is a valuable source of community input and a way to build awareness about what a pop-up project is and why one is being done.

The steps:

1. Choose a starting location that's familiar to the community.
2. Create an agenda and review it with any co-leaders or helpers. (Plan on one hour for the presentation and questions, then another hour for the walking tour.)
3. Greet attendees and give them an agenda that doubles as a take-home flyer detailing the next steps.
4. Provide snacks and water. Consider asking a local musician to play ambient, live music before the presentation or walk begins.
5. Ask the attendees questions about the community and the demonstration proposal and location. Their answers can be crucial.
6. Invite the walk participants to help with the pop-up preparations and attend the demonstration event.



# 3 Make a Plan

A “concept plan map” is the pop-up’s playbook. It’s presented in a visual way so everyone involved can see what’s being proposed rather than simply reading or being told about it.

The completed plan reflects specifics of the location, concerns raised by stakeholders, and suggestions or requests made by residents.

From all of that input — which has been gathered through the walk-and-talk (see previous page) and other means — the pop-up team can determine which elements match the project’s goals, which will be included in the demonstration and how they will all fit together.

## POTENTIAL POP-UP ELEMENTS

There is no one-size-fits-all formula for, say, a crosswalk pop-up or traffic calming demonstration. Each project is built from scratch.

The icons below represent some of the elements or interventions that can be included. A more extensive list of suggestions (and project recipes) begins on page 23.



Bike Lane



Crosswalk



Traffic Calming



Pop-Up Shop



Public Seating



Food Truck



Activities



Planters



Wayfinding



Landscaping



Parklet



Community Stage

## HOW TO MAKE A CONCEPT PLAN MAP



- 1 Once a demonstration location is selected, go to Google Maps and take a screenshot of the aerial view. Better yet, if a drone camera is available, fly it above the space where the pop-up will happen and take before and after photographs. The before image will become the “base map.”



- 2 Computer design software can be used to insert icons or sketches onto the base map. Otherwise, print the base map and use colored markers, stickers or pencils to indicate where each intervention will be located.



- 3 Once the concept plan map is complete, give the project a name, pick a social media hashtag and make copies of the plan for the team. The map can also be used to file for permits, if needed, and for planning how to route pedestrians and vehicles during the pop-up event.



▲ BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA: “Complete Streets” are roads that have been designed for the safety of all users. (Learn more on page 22.) To “complete” a section of Second Avenue South, this concept plan narrows travel lanes and adds a bike lane, crosswalks and a 10-foot-wide shared-use path.

▼ HANOVER, PENNSYLVANIA: Team Better Block sought input from residents when selecting the elements for this alley activation project, which featured a pretzel-themed surface (honoring Snyder’s of Hanover–brand pretzels), outdoor games, decorative planters, seating and food trucks.



## STREET INTERVENTIONS



BIKE LANES



CROSSWALKS



TRAFFIC CALMING

## PUBLIC SPACE INTERVENTIONS



PLANTERS



PLAY PARKLET



RETENTION PARKLET



SCAFFOLDING PARKLET



SEATING



STAGE



STREET ART



WAYFINDING

## PROGRAMMING



FOOD TRUCKS



GAMES



# 4

## Determine an Approach and Budget — and Follow the Rules

A pop-up project can be a grassroots undertaking with few resources or a formal effort that’s implemented with partner organizations and financed by grant or local government funding. No matter the approach, the principal goals of a pop-up demonstration are typically the same, and that is the safe use of a public or private space to demonstrate, document and prototype how a location can be made more vibrant and useful in service to the community.



### THE GRASSROOTS APPROACH

This is often used by a group of individuals or a local organization when municipal staff and community leaders are unfamiliar with placemaking or lack the desire or capacity to actively participate in a pop-up demonstration project.

### THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

In some communities, the leadership and staff of the local government are willing to assist with a pop-up project. A partnership approach can mobilize more resources, lead to installations staying in place longer and even result in permanent improvements being made.

### PRO TIP: Don’t Forget the Permits

- ✓ To learn which permits, if any, are required, search the county or municipality’s website for “special event permits” or “block party permits.” Few local governments provide a one-stop shop for this information and the required forms, so if, for example, food will be served or sold at the event, a search may need to be done on the local health department’s website. If alcohol will be served, a temporary liquor license or permit will be required. (Tip: If the permit process for using public land is overly complex, it might be easier to host the pop-up project on property owned by a local business or resident.)
- ✓ Application requirements and deadlines for permits vary greatly. Learn what is due when and include the dates in the planning schedule. Some permits will be issued with no additional questions. Others might require the project leaders to present the pop-up plans at a community meeting or before a permitting panel.
- ✓ While it’s important to submit permit applications early enough for them to be processed, submitting before key project details are decided can cause more problems than it prevents. Seek permits and publicly share an event date only after the concept plan map (see page 12) is completed.

#### NEEDED DOCUMENTS:



Special Event Permit



Building Permit



Health and Food Safety Permit



Traffic Control Plan

## PAYING FOR A POP-UP

Since pop-up projects rely on volunteer labor and generally use materials that have been donated, recycled or crowd-sourced, pop-up demonstrations are by nature inexpensive to stage and sometimes free.

When launching a pop-up project, assess what funds are available. Depending on a demonstration's goals, additional money might be necessary.

Online fundraising platforms and crowd-funding websites can be used to explain and finance a project. Many foundations and local or national organizations fund community development and placemaking efforts.

In fact, the AARP Community Challenge has funded several pop-up demonstration projects. Learn more about this “quick-action” grant program at [AARP.org/CommunityChallenge](https://www.aarp.org/CommunityChallenge).

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## A HISTORY LESSON



▲ DALLAS, TEXAS: The first-ever “better block” pop-up project came to life in 2010, in the city’s historic Oak Cliff neighborhood.

The pop-up demonstration concept and methodology emerged from a community-wide “art-crawl” event that was organized and attended by people who had rarely or never interacted. By getting neighbors to buy into the concept of people-centered streets, pop-up shops opened, a bicycle lane was created, and the presence of outdoor seating areas persuaded people to stick around, talk and relax. The crawl sparked a revitalization of Dallas’ Oak Cliff neighborhood and inspired friends Jason Roberts and Andrew Howard to create Team Better Block, the urban planning and consulting firm that is a co-creator of this publication.

“We’ll be taking a car-centric four lane street with poor zoning and restrictive development ordinances, and convert it into a people-friendly neighborhood block. For two days only, we’ll install three pop-up businesses, including a coffee shop, flower store, and kids’ art studio and we’ll be bringing in historic lighting, outdoor café seating, and more.... This event is being developed to highlight the changes Dallas should focus on if it truly wants to compete with other major U.S. cities.”

— From a publicity pamphlet for the Oak Cliff Art Crawl



# 5 Start the Build!

The penultimate and (to many) most exciting part of the demonstration process is what’s routinely referred to as “build week.” This is when the pop-up components are prepped for action.

## SMART SCHEDULING

- The build week — or build weekend or days or day — should be scheduled well in advance so volunteers can plan accordingly. The build period itself needs to have a schedule detailing when each demonstration item will be built and where. (Make sure volunteers know if the work is being done indoors or outside so they can dress appropriately.)
- While a few volunteers will commit to a full day or several days of work, many won’t be able to contribute that much time. To avoid scaring help away, structure the build sessions for two-hour periods. For instance, a morning session could run from 10 a.m. to noon. After a break for lunch, other sessions can begin at 1 p.m., 3 and so on.
- Some of the highest attendance times for build workshops is after normal work and school hours. Don’t shut down too early and miss out on the help of people who can’t arrive before 6 p.m. but are willing to work until 8 or later. (Be sure there’s adequate lighting for work done after dark.)
- Organize the work according to the length of time required to complete an element or intervention feature and the number of volunteers needed. (If pop-up shops will operate in vacant properties or poorly maintained spaces, allow enough time for the hard work of cleaning, stocking and setting up.)
- When possible, start the build work with a task that can be completed quickly, such as painting or decorating. That way the team can feel a sense of accomplishment on day one.

## VOLUNTEER CARE

- It helps to organize volunteers into teams. For instance, there can be a Building Team, a Decorating Team and an Event Planning Team.
- Allow people to help for as much or as little time as they choose. If someone commits to several days, that’s great. Other community members might only be willing or able to give an hour. That’s OK too.
- After volunteers sign in, provide them with instructions about their tasks, needed equipment and related safety information. Make the sessions fun — and offer something to eat and drink.
- Ask volunteers to post on social media to build community interest and excitement for the big reveal.
- Think about giving each volunteer a take-home item such as a pop-up branded lanyard badge so he or she will be recognized as a participant and have a souvenir of the experience. It’s not unusual for the people who work on pop-up projects to develop lasting bonds that benefit themselves and future community activities.



▲ BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA: Volunteers built a “limitless lane,” which is wider and slower than a typical bike lane.

## CREATE OR CHOOSE A RECIPE

Recipes make it easy for volunteers to bring elements from the concept plan map (see page 12) to life. They're also a great way to organize the teams and supplies. A collection of Team Better Block pop-up project recipes begins on page 23. The following format can help when writing a recipe from scratch or adapting an existing one.

<b>DEMONSTRATION TYPE:</b>
<b>DESCRIPTION:</b>
<b>MATERIALS   SUPPLIES   EQUIPMENT:</b>
<b>STEPS:</b>

◀ Note the type of project the recipe is for. Examples might include a bike lane or parklet.

◀ Indicate what the item will look like and how it will be used.

◀ Make a list of needed supplies and tools, some of which might be lent or donated to the project by local businesses or residents.

◀ Detail the order in which the tools and "ingredients" should be used and how.

**PRO TIP: A Point About Paint**  
The colorful bike lanes, paths and plazas created during a pop-up demonstration will wash away with the rain or fade over time if water-soluble tempera paint is used. If lasting color is desired, use oil or latex paints instead.



# 6 Host an Event

The items and experiences that are created for a pop-up demonstration need to be seen and used. To ensure that residents know about the project and experience how it can benefit where they live, invite the community to a party!

The better the show, the more support for permanent change a pop-up demonstration will receive from those who attend the event. Similar to the placemaking triangulation framework introduced on page 6, the ideal formula for a pop-up demonstration's debut features entertainment, food and beverages, and fun activities.

Project volunteers and supporters can help select and schedule local entertainers. Outdoor games (ping-pong, sidewalk chess) and other group activities (yoga, dancing) complete the plan. The programming needn't be continuous. Restaurants, catering services and boutique eateries that are unique to the community can be invited to sell from their menus at booths or out of food trucks. Events with food are well attended when the hours of operation overlap with a mealtime.

Typically, most of a project's budget is spent for event day — in order to rent audiovisual equipment, for instance, or generators, lighting or portable restrooms.



▲ FORT WORTH, TEXAS: An event unveiling a pop-up plaza and limitless lane in the Ash Crescent area attracted 200 attendees.

◀ BUFFALO, NEW YORK: A vacant lot in the Fruitvale neighborhood was transformed into a gathering place with a stage (shown), raised-bed planters and outdoor games.

## BUT WAIT — THERE’S MORE!

The end of a pop-up demonstration event isn’t the end of the work. Since the ultimate goal is to improve a community through its built environment and by connecting residents, complete success can only happen if the pop-up team, local supporters and the event’s participants advocate for keeping certain features (such as string-lighting across an alleyway) and pursue permanent change. Consider the following as To-Do’s:



Send thank-you letters to local leaders and community members who helped bring the project to life



Get an article into the newspaper or on a local website explaining what just happened



Survey residents and ask which pop-up features they’d like to make permanent



Compile supportive data and share it



Meet with the mayor or county executive and council members to share feedback, photos and data



Arrange to speak at the next council or community meeting



Help the pop-up shops remain in business by negotiating leases and finding funding partners



Host more pop-up activities and community events



Keep the conversation going on social media

## POP-UP PROJECT DO’S AND DON’TS

- **DON’T** wait to get started. Set a date 90 days out, share the idea on social media and ask for help. Putting off the pop-up demonstration until the time is “right” is a license to procrastinate.
- **DON’T** take on too much. Limit the demonstration to a single block or small area. The term “toddler-scale” is often used when determining the size of a project space. It works by asking, “How far would a parent let his or her child wander?” That’s the project’s limit.
- **DO** watch the weather forecasts. It’s not worth painting a street on Monday if the event is on Saturday and it’s going to rain on Thursday.
- **DO** keep the pop-up event short, ideally no more than four hours. Events that last too long can wear out volunteers and seem sad when the crowd thins out.
- **DO** take lots of pictures and videos. In many ways, the event didn’t happen if it isn’t documented. Ask people to upload images to a photo-sharing site and post pictures on social media using an event hashtag.
- **DO** keep the momentum going. Schedule a gathering of the sponsors and volunteers to talk about what’s next. Keep up the advocacy efforts to make the demonstrated improvements permanent.



# 7

## Make It Permanent

Not every pop-up demonstration project will or can become a permanent community fixture. But the impact of the effort can be, and often is, lasting because it inspires change.

### SUCCESS STORY: Des Moines, Iowa

What happened on East Grand Avenue in Des Moines, Iowa, provides a textbook example of how a pop-up project can inspire long-term, impactful change.

In January 2017, the city began writing Move DSM, its first-ever 25-year transportation plan. Within a year the completed plan had stalled without a vote by the city council due to questions about sidewalks, bike lanes and prioritizing projects.

To help build momentum, AARP Iowa partnered with Team Better Block to host a multimodal pop-up demonstration project on East Grand Avenue. Among the goals were to show how protected bicycle lanes and a buffer zone between fast-moving motor vehicles and walk/bike pathways improve public safety and benefit local businesses. The demonstration reawakened interest in Move DSM among residents and the media.

By observing how the Complete Streets approach to roadway design (see page 22) made East Grand Avenue safer for all users, skeptics became convinced of Move DSM's value. In November 2018, the plan was approved by a unanimous vote in the city council. A few months later, a local sales tax option was placed on the ballot to fund Move DSM.

Passage of the plan was a priority for Age-Friendly Greater Des Moines, the coalition that leads the region's livability efforts. To advocate for the ballot measure, AARP Iowa held a tele-town hall. Volunteers mailed handwritten postcards and knocked on doors to encourage their neighbors to vote in favor of the tax.

In March 2019, a larger-than-expected voter turnout resulted in a 70 to 30 percent victory for the Move DSM funding measure.

### SUCCESS STORY: Bethel, Vermont

Bethel, Vermont, was once a bustling industrial town, but over time the number of large employers dwindled, leaving empty storefronts and limited employment opportunities.

A revitalization plan developed in the 1990s called for a riverfront boardwalk, streetscaping, a renovated Town Hall, parking lot improvements and more. Some of those elements were built, most were forgotten.

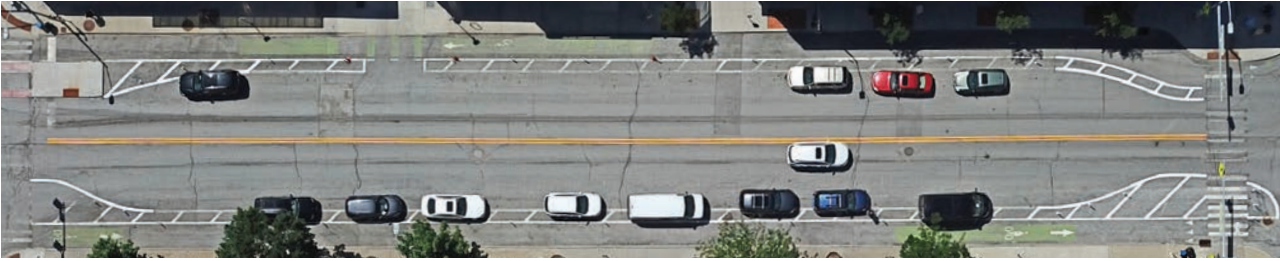
In 2011, Bethel hit a low point when Tropical Storm Irene devastated the downtown and surrounding community.

After Irene, there was a sense that Bethel had little to offer. One critical bright spot was an ad hoc community group, the Bethel Revitalization Initiative, which described itself as a "do-ocracy," meaning "people show up with good ideas and then do them."

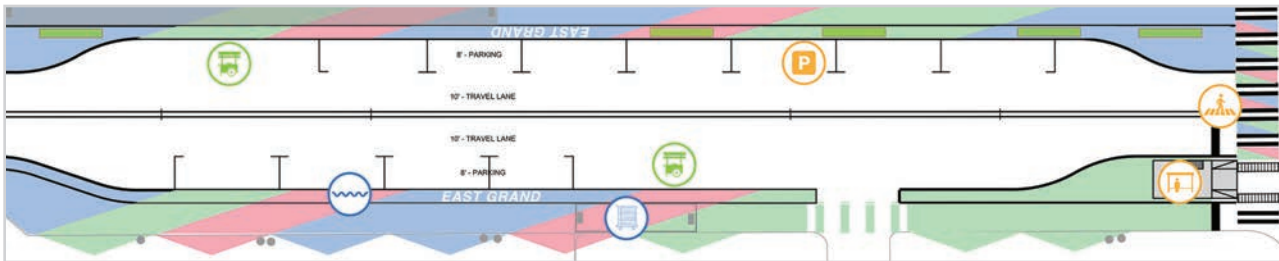
For three days in October 2016, downtown Bethel was transformed with the help of AARP Vermont and Team Better Block. Since the event, curb extensions (shown) have been added, public art has been installed, and several of the temporary pop-up shops have settled into downtown storefronts.

## EAST GRAND AVENUE, DES MOINES, IOWA

### ▼ BEFORE



### ▼ PROPOSED



### ▼ DURING THE POP-UP DEMONSTRATION



◀ MAIN STREET, BETHEL, VERMONT: During the Bethel Better Block pop-up demonstration event in 2016 (far left), bulbout curb extensions were crafted out of straw-filled wattles encircling potted plants. Soon after, rubber bulbouts (left) were installed along the roadway.



# Make It “Complete”

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## INSPIRING EXAMPLE: Fort Wayne, Indiana

Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders.

“Creating Complete Streets means transportation agencies must change their approach to community roads,” explains the National Complete Streets Coalition. “By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation.”

The pictured Complete Streets demonstration by AARP and Team Better Block includes: (1) A one-way road with curbside parking. (2) A floating parking lane situated away from the curb that acts as a safety buffer. (3) A landscaped bed, represented by potted plants, that serves as a swale, or pervious surface for capturing

stormwater. (4) A very visible crosswalk. (5) A limitless lane, which is shared by bicyclists, wheelchair users, joggers and others. (6) An existing sidewalk that is a safe distance from the automobile and bicycle lanes.

Although the pop-up didn’t become permanent, its presence had impact. A few months after the demonstration, the city of Fort Wayne was working on plans to add bike lanes and provide better connections between streets for pedestrians and cyclists.

Seeing a Complete Streets demonstration in person (or in a publication such as this one) enables people to understand and then advocate for Complete Streets. Because news about a pop-up project in one community can inspire similar efforts elsewhere, every demonstration has the potential to inspire permanent change.

If that happens in your community, please let us know. ■

# The Pop-Up Recipe Catalog

Every neighborhood has a unique character and distinctive assets. This collection of pop-up demonstration recipes from Team Better Block can be followed as described or else adapted. The recipes include tasks for people of varying skill levels and talents. Once started, pop-up projects move fast and furiously, and a lot of the details don't fall into place until the week of the event. Prepare in advance as much as possible, but be prepared to pivot.



## THE BEGINNER RECIPES ARE GOOD FOR PEOPLE WHO ...

- Are new to placemaking
- Are looking for quick and easy community projects
- Are new to or uncomfortable using power tools



## THE INTERMEDIATE RECIPES ARE GOOD FOR PEOPLE WHO ...

- Know their way around a toolbox
- Can assemble a team
- Have neighborhood support



## THE ADVANCED RECIPES ARE GOOD FOR PEOPLE WHO ...

- Work for a county or municipality planning office
- Have secured local government support for a pop-up demonstration
- Have experience in urban planning, architecture, design or a related field



# GREEN BIKE LANE



AKRON, OHIO

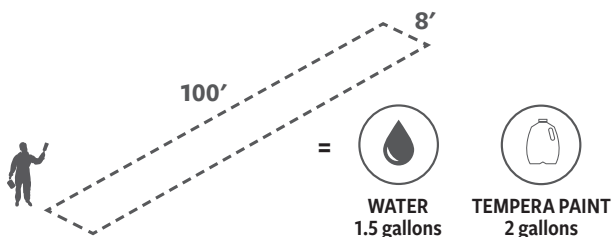
## DESCRIPTION

Bike lanes provide a designated space for cyclists to ride on a street. Colored pavement increases the path's visibility, identifies areas of potential danger, reinforces the right-of-way of bicyclists and discourages drivers from parking illegally.

## TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The consistent application of color throughout a bikeway corridor helps all travelers understand where the path is located.

P.S. In most communities, street-level pop-ups (such as bike lanes) require approval from the local department of streets or transportation.



## TYPICAL MATERIALS, SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT



TRAFFIC VESTS



PUSH BROOM



MEASURING TAPE



TRAFFIC CONES



5-GALLON PAINT BUCKET



GREEN TEMPERA PAINT



BIKE LANE STENCIL



WHITE DUCT TAPE



WHITE CHALK SPRAY



WATER SOURCE



BUCKET SCREEN



CHALK LINE



STRIPING MACHINE

OR



PAINT ROLLERS

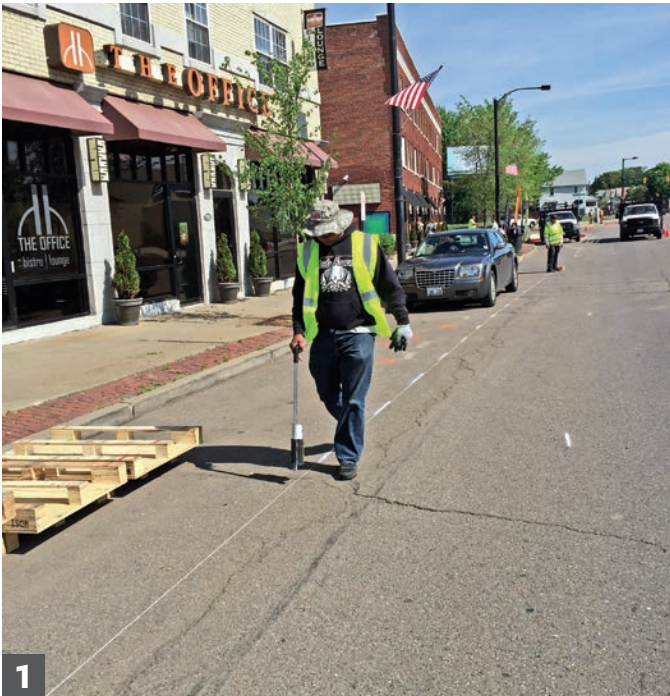


ROLLER NAPS

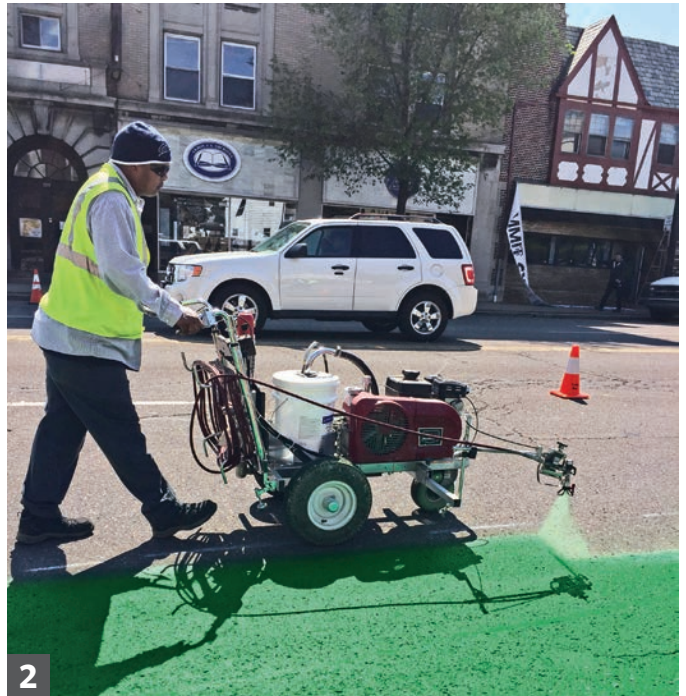


ROLLER POLES





**1** Use push brooms to remove debris from the street. Measure at least 6 feet from the curb, mark with chalk spray, then mark every 15 feet along the lane and use a snap chalk line to connect the marks. Duct tape can be used along this line to define the edge while painting.



**2** Mix the paint with water. (See the ratios on page 24.) If using a striping machine, follow the manufacturer's guidelines for latex paint. If painting with rollers, use the 5-gallon bucket with a screen. Dip the rollers as needed and paint directly onto the pavement.



**3** When the paint is dry, place the bike lane stencil at points along the lane and spray it with the white chalk.



**4** Apply white duct tape to delineate the lane. Or use the striping machine to paint a white line as finishing trim.

Find a basic bike lane recipe at [TeamBetterBlock.com/Recipes](https://www.teambetterblock.com/Recipes) and check out more bike lane ideas on page 32.



**ALLEY ACTIVATIONS**

Alleyways are among the most underused public spaces in America. Draw attention to them by adding café-style chairs and tables, and overhead decorations such as paper chains (shown), banners, LED string lights or (see page 37) umbrellas.

**Newnan, Georgia****COLORFUL CROSSWALKS**

A bright, colorful, artistic crosswalk alerts pedestrians, cyclists and motorists to its presence, which makes the street safer for all users.

**Des Moines, Iowa****COMMUNITY STAGE**

Place a slightly raised platform on a lawn, sidewalk or closed street and the performers among us — whether they're 2 years old, 22 or even more seasoned — will take the stage to sing, dance, tell a story or simply pretend.

**Buffalo, New York****OUTDOOR GAMES**

Successful public spaces offer activities and support active uses. Ping-pong tables and cornhole boards are fairly easy to create, and the games are fun for people of all ages.

**Columbus, Ohio****POP-UP ROUNDABOUTS**

Also called traffic circles, roundabouts force vehicles that are passing through intersections without traffic lights to slow down. Creating a temporary roundabout by using paint and hay bales lets a community test the solution's effectiveness.

**Greensboro, North Carolina**



**POP-UP SHOPS**

Allowing a business to briefly occupy a vacant retail location activates an unused space, provides the community with a destination, and enables entrepreneurs to explore the economic viability of their service or product.

**Bethel, Vermont**



**PUBLIC ART**

Murals, sculptures, mosaics, interactive displays and other outdoor art installations enliven spaces and often provide information about a community’s history and culture. Public art displays are also a great way of lauding and promoting local talent.

**Columbus, Ohio**



**RAISED-BED PLANTERS**

Planting crops in beds that people don’t have to stoop or sit on the ground to use is an age-friendly way to grow fresh produce in one’s own yard or a community green space.

**Buffalo, New York**



**SEATING**

Everybody sits! Public seating is an essential ingredient in placemaking. Benches, chairs and other forms of outdoor furniture invite passersby to linger, visit and enjoy a shared community space.

**Pittsfield, Massachusetts**



**SIGNAGE**

Directional signage is referred to as “wayfinding.” Its strategically placed arrows, mileage indications and other useful information help people get where they are going and make a community more welcoming.

**Columbus, Ohio**



# MILK CRATE PARKLET



FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

## DESCRIPTION

A parklet is a street space, typically the size of one or two parking spots, where *people* — rather than cars — can park themselves and relax.

## TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leave space between the curb and parklet so stormwater and debris can flow past the structure. See the National Association of City Transportation Officials' *Urban Street Design Guide* for parklet safety guidelines and best practices.

## TYPICAL MATERIALS, SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT



TRAFFIC VESTS



PUSH BROOM



MEASURING TAPE



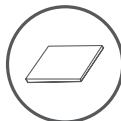
TRAFFIC CONES



DELINEATOR POSTS



LUMBER  
(See Step 1)



PLYWOOD  
3/4" x 4' x 8'



CIRCULAR SAW



EXTERIOR PAINT



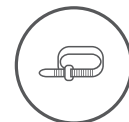
MILK CRATES



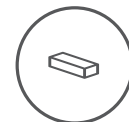
CORDLESS DRILL



DECK SCREWS



ZIP TIES



CURB STOPS



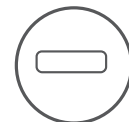
PLANTS



ROLLER TRAYS



PAINT ROLLERS



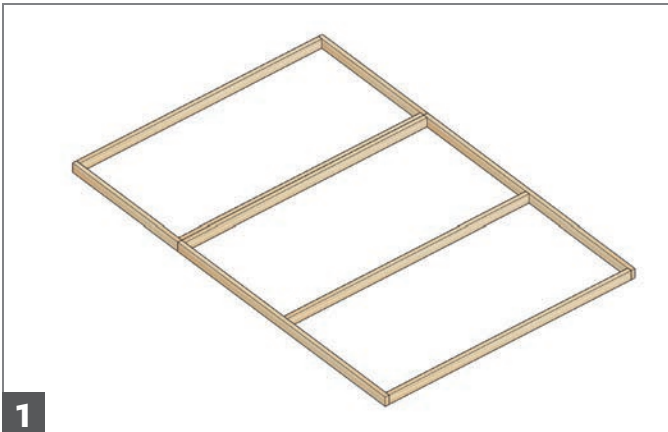
ROLLER NAPS



ROLLER POLES



PAINTBRUSHES



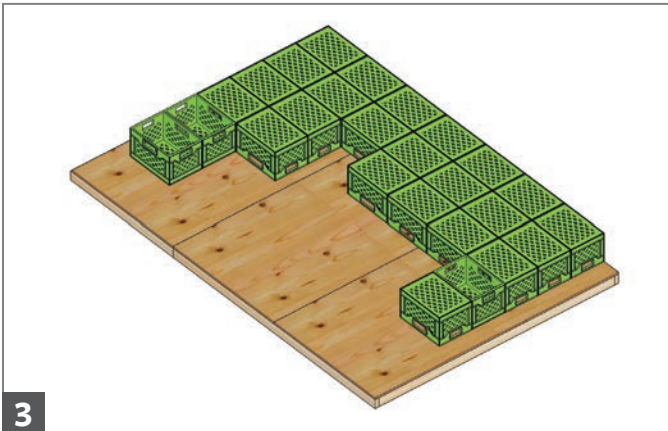
1

Place four 2" x 4" x 8' and two 2" x 4" x 12' lengths of lumber on the ground as shown. Connect the pieces with deck screws to create an 8' x 12' base frame.



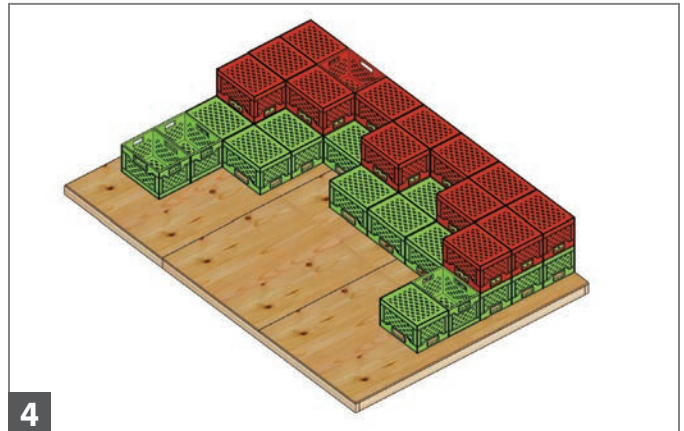
2

Set the plywood on top of the frame. (No cutting or supports should be needed.) Use the screws to secure the sheets to the frame. Paint the base if desired.



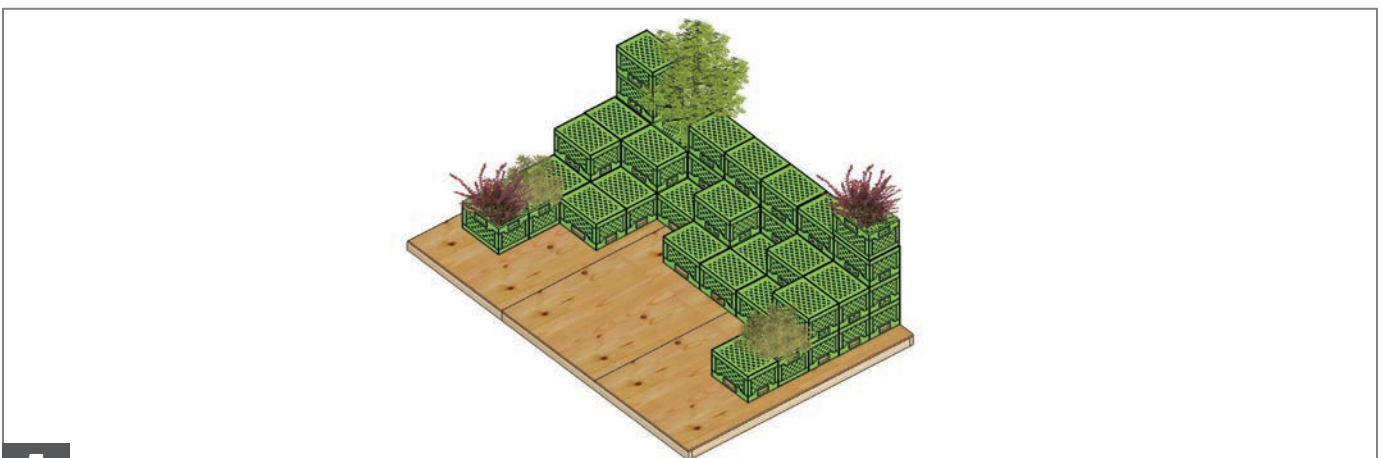
3

Create a bottom layer of milk crates with the open sides down. Zip-tie the crates together.



4

Continue stacking and zip-tying the crates in a desired arrangement to create a variety of seating options.



5

Add more crates to serve as seat backs. Place a few crates with the open sides up for displaying potted shrubs. Secure the crates with zip ties. For fancier seating, add seat cushions that can be tied to the crates. Install the curb stops and delineator posts along the parklet side that's closest to oncoming traffic.

Find a recipe for a basic parklet at [TeamBetterBlock.com/Recipes](https://www.teambetterblock.com/Recipes) and more parklet options on page 33.



**BULBOUTS**

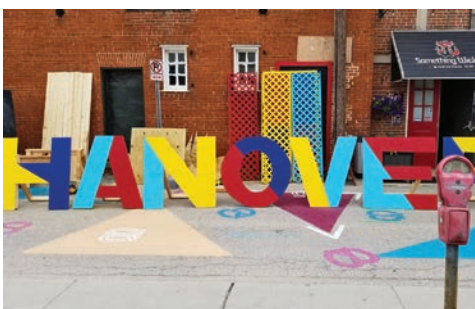
A bulbout is a traffic-calming structure that extends a sidewalk, thereby reducing the crossing distance and enabling motorists to see pedestrians when a parked vehicle might otherwise obstruct their view.

**Bethel, Vermont****FARMERS MARKETS**

Organizing a market where area farmers can sell their produce and goods helps residents support local growers, fosters healthy eating in neighborhoods that lack fresh produce choices and can even spur economic activity in struggling communities.

**Columbus, Ohio****IDENTITY CROSSWALKS**

While crosswalks typically consist of white lines on dark pavement, color and creativity can also be used. For instance, depictions of colorful fruit brighten this path in the Fruit Belt neighborhood.

**Buffalo, New York****IDENTITY SIGNAGE**

Many neighborhoods have distinctive names but, often, no signage telling passersby where they are. Identity signage can help visitors get their bearings and become a landmark (and social media magnet) in its own right.

**Hanover, Pennsylvania****INTERSECTION MURAL**

Street art (as in art that is created *in* and *on* the street) serves as a place marker and traffic calming solution. An intersection or on-street mural can be maintained by the community or repainted with a new design from time to time.

**Greensboro, North Carolina**



**POP-UP PLAZAS**

Closing a section of a street to cars can “parkify” a roadway into a place for people. In many spaces, all that’s needed are a few plants and some patio-style furnishings.

**Akron, Ohio**

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**SEMI-PERMANENT WAYFINDING**

The beginner section of this recipe catalog includes a description of wayfinding (aka directional signage) and shows a temporary, easy-to-create sign. Semi-permanent wayfinding signs can help define a place through the use of color and distinctive design.

**Des Moines, Iowa**

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**STREET PLAZAS**

Closing a lightly traveled street to vehicular traffic can turn the roadway into a destination with fun activities, interesting sights and, ideally, plenty of good food.

**Fort Worth, Texas**

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**TRANSIT STOPS**

Bus stops, taxi stands and designated ride-sharing pickup areas can be designed to shelter passengers in unique, locally inspired ways.

**Bethel, Vermont**

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## A BOUNTY OF BIKE LANES

A bicycle lane is often the first type of pop-up intervention a community tries. There are lots of ways to create a demonstration bike lane. Here are just a few:



Fort Wayne, Indiana



Des Moines, Iowa

### LIMITLESS LANES

With a limitless lane, which is wider than a traditional bike lane, a portion of the street is set aside for cyclists and pedestrians, as well as for people using wheelchairs, scooters or other nonmotorized vehicles.

### RAISED CYCLE TRACKS

These types of lanes are set slightly higher than the roadway. Many are paired with a “furnishing zone” (shown) to further separate the cycle track from motor vehicles or pedestrians or both.



Des Moines, Iowa



Pittsfield, Massachusetts

### BUFFERED BIKE LANE

Adding a painted double line, or delineator, increases the visibility of a bicycle lane and protects cyclists from open car doors.

### TWO-WAY CYCLE TRACK

When only one side of the street can accommodate bicycles, a two-lane, two-way path is a safe and useful option.

**Find instructions for these bike lanes and parklets at [TeamBetterBlock.com/Recipes](https://www.teambetterblock.com/recipes)**



## PLENTY OF PARKLETS

Parking spots for people rather than cars can be crafted from plywood, paint, decorative accessories and boundless imagination

### ART PARKLETS

A parklet can become almost anything its creators want it to be. The only requirement is that the space equal the size of one, maybe two parking spots. The maritime-themed parklet at right features a calm sea of paint, a sailcloth for shade and seating created by slicing a discarded wooden rowboat in half.



Greensboro, North Carolina

### PLAY PARKLETS

Children *can* play in the street if a parking spot is transformed into a contained play space. The one shown here is set up as a futsal (aka small soccer) court.



Albuquerque, New Mexico



# PLYWOOD MURALS



## DESCRIPTION

Murals have the power to transform places, communities and institutions. They can empower artists to be change agents, stimulate dialogue about critical issues, brighten dull spaces and establish a local identity. Murals, which can be temporary or permanent, are traditionally painted directly onto an existing surface, such as a wall or ceiling. When neither is available (or permission to paint on one isn't granted), plywood makes a useful canvas.

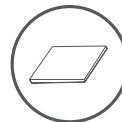
## TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If a professional artist isn't available to create a masterpiece, fabricate or purchase and then paint pre-cut shapes (like those used for a project in Fort Worth, Texas, and shown on the opposite page).

## TYPICAL MATERIALS, SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT



LUMBER  
2" x 4" x 8'



PLYWOOD  
1/4" x 4' x 8'



CIRCULAR SAW



PAINT



PAINTBRUSHES



CORDLESS DRILL



DECK SCREWS



WORK GLOVES



ROLLER TRAYS



PAINT ROLLERS



ROLLER NAPS



ROLLER POLES



MEASURING  
TAPE



LADDER



STANDARD PLYWOOD MURAL



1

The best way to hang a plywood mural is to secure 2" x 4" strips of lumber to a wall by using a drill and screws. These six strips will hold one sheet of plywood.



2

Secure the mural (this one uses four sheets of plywood) to the lumber that has been attached to the wall. The mural can be painted in place or prior to installation.

PRECUT PLYWOOD MURAL



1

Purchase or create plywood shapes that can hang on a wall, fence or other surface. Volunteers can paint the shapes.



2

If the shapes will be attached to lumber strips and the strips will be visible, paint the strips as well.





**BASKETBALL COURT MURALS**

Painting the surface of an old, asphalt basketball court livens up the space and can provide the community with a sense of identity and ownership.

**Columbus, Ohio**



**BEER GARDENS**

When alcohol is served at a pop-up event, it should be done in a spot where access can be restricted to people 21 or older. With a little creativity, such a space can be designed and constructed to not look like a cattle corral.

**Pittsfield, Massachusetts**



**DIGITALLY FABRICATED SEATING**

Having a place where passersby can stop and rest is an important part of placemaking. Simply placing chairs or benches on a sidewalk or lawn is often enough to convince people to stop and take a break. Prefabricated, some-assembly-required outdoor seating options are available at pop-up affordable prices.

**Columbus, Ohio**



**FACADE FACELIFTS**

Storefronts in need of a new look can get one by using pop-up elements that quickly add curb appeal.

**Pittsfield, Massachusetts**



**HEXAGON BULBOUTS**

Street-slimming bulbouts are installed to slow vehicle speeds in areas used by pedestrians. Among the many ways to create a bulbout is to place modular blocks in or along a roadway. Some models can be equipped with technology for gathering traffic and pedestrian data.

**Birmingham, Alabama**



**RUBBER TRAFFIC BARRIERS** Modular rubber blocks and barriers can create traffic calming interventions such as bulbouts, pedestrian islands and (see below) traffic roundabouts.

**Greensboro, North Carolina**



**SCAFFOLDING MARKET**

A semi-permanent venue created with a scaffold system can be used to test whether residents will support the types of stores, businesses and eateries that set up shop. Such structures are often used at farmers markets, craft fairs and other mobile retail venues.

**Haverhill, Massachusetts**



**TRAFFIC ROUNDABOUTS (SEMI-PERMANENT)**

Using rubber curbing and delineator posts to create a traffic calming circle can make a pop-up demonstration roundabout last for years.

**Fort Worth, Texas**



**UMBRELLA ALLEY**

Hanging opened umbrellas above an alleyway can make an empty or underutilized outdoor space noticeable, welcoming and — when equipped with seating and tables — usable by passersby and the occupants of adjacent buildings. (See the back cover for before and after photos of Pittsfield’s alley enhancements.)

**Pittsfield, Massachusetts**

**POP US A POP-UP PHOTO**

Pop-up placemaking features, projects and demonstrations are popping up in all sorts of places, spaces and communities. If you see or create a pop-up, let us know!

- Post a picture and caption on social media: Use the hashtag **#placemaking**
- Tag us on Twitter: **@AARPLivable** and **@TeamBetterBlock**
- Or tag us on Facebook: **/AARPLivableCommunities** and **/TeamBetterBlock**



# The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit

Projects that inspire change — and improve communities for people of all ages

When residents help identify and solve the challenges that affect their daily lives — whether it's a half-vacant Main Street or roads that make walking or bicycling unsafe — communities and local leaders are more likely to achieve and sustain success. Seeing potential solutions is also more effective than simply reading, hearing or talking about them.

*The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit* by AARP and Team Better Block was created to inform a broad audience of local leaders, policymakers, advocates and neighborhood residents about the many ways temporary projects can inspire and initiate long-term community improvements.

This publication, which includes placemaking “recipes” from Team Better Block, is a practical guide to demonstrating and implementing positive change. Readers are encouraged to use or adapt the recipes to help make their communities more livable for people of all ages.



▲▼ A demonstration project in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, turned an alleyway into a destination that pops!



▲ A parklet in Pocatello, Idaho



▲ A bike lane in Akron, Ohio



▲ Ping-pong in Fort Wayne, Indiana



To learn when AARP releases new livability publications, sign up for the free, weekly AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter: [AARP.org/LivableSubscribe](http://AARP.org/LivableSubscribe).

To learn more about pop-up demonstration projects and the Team Better Block process, visit [TeamBetterBlock.com](http://TeamBetterBlock.com).

