



# Public Spaces Evaluation Tool

for Public Space and Public Life

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## Engagement Report



NSW Department of Planning,  
Industry and Environment

March 2021



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Aboriginal people take a holistic view of land, water and culture and see them as one, not in isolation to each other. The Draft Evaluation Tool for Public Spaces and Public Life Engagement Report is based on the premise upheld by Aboriginal people that if we care for Country, it will care for us.

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Public Spaces Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life Engagement Report

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*Image: Moore Park with a view,  
Centennial Parklands  
Credit: Centennial Parklands*

# Overview

## Why public space matters

Public spaces are our open spaces, public facilities and streets. They are publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free. Public spaces are the heart of our communities. Great places provide diverse opportunities for social interactions, have a strong character, and are welcoming, inclusive and beautiful. Our public spaces support our happiness, health and well-being, environmental resilience and prosperous local economies.

## Premier's Priority Greener Public Spaces

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's (the department) Public Spaces Division oversees the Premier's Priority - Greener Public Spaces (Premier's Priority), which aims to increase the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes' walk of quality green, open, and public space by 10% by 2023.

Our mission is to improve walkable access to quality green, open and public spaces across New South Wales (NSW). Defining and measuring the quality of public spaces is a crucial part of the Premier's Priority. The quality of a public space is just as important as your walkable access to it because quality is what contributes to people feeling safe, welcome and included. Quality is reflected not only in a public space's physical form—how its designed, maintained and integrated with its environment—but also through the activities it supports and the meaning it holds.

*Image: Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery  
Credit: Destination NSW*

## Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life and Great Public Spaces Guide

One way we aim to help address the quality of public space is the Great Public Spaces Toolkit (Toolkit). The Toolkit is a collection of free resources to support local and state government, industry and the broader community. The department is developing resources that anyone can use to support planning, managing and creating better and more vibrant public spaces.

The Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life (Evaluation Tool) is the first resource in the Toolkit, and more case studies, tools and guidance will be added over time. The Evaluation Tool can be used by anyone who wants to better understand the strengths and areas for improvement of a public space. The tool takes people through a series of questions to identify how they use public spaces. This information can be used to inform future planning, design, and investment and to improve public space for everyone.

The Evaluation Tool is also supported by the Great Public Spaces Guide (Guide), which is an introduction to understanding the meaning of public space and place, and the elements that contribute to creating a great public facility, open space or street.

The engagement exhibition period for the Evaluation Tool is part of a broader communications campaign to raise awareness of the value and benefits of public spaces, especially during COVID-19 as we re-equip our cities and towns to activate public spaces, bringing them back to life.





*Image: St James Station, Sydney, Credit: Damien Carroll*

## Hearing from the community

We are committed to using a citizen-led approach to deliver the Premier's Priority. The draft Evaluation Tool went on public exhibition from 20 October to 17 November 2020. This approach aimed to engage the community in the value of evaluating public spaces so they could provide feedback and help us improve the Evaluation Tool before finalisation. During the public exhibition, the department consulted members of the community, industry, agencies, state and local government to help make the Evaluation Tool as useful as possible. This report summarises the feedback received on the draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide. It includes the

comments and suggestions received during the public exhibition in 2020 and provides responses to this feedback from the Public Spaces Division in the department.

Before the public exhibition, the draft Evaluation Tool was developed and tested with six partner councils from across NSW as part of the Places to Love Program. These councils included; Blacktown City Council, Burwood Council, City of Sydney, Liverpool City Council, Penrith City Council, and Wagga Wagga City Council. The Evaluation Tool was also subject to international peer review by Gehl, PlacemakingX and Project for Public Spaces before release.

# Engagement context

Since the creation of a new ministerial portfolio for Public Spaces and the establishment of a dedicated Public Spaces departmental team in mid-2019, a citizen-led approach to public space has been one of its primary goals.

The department gathered insights from the community in two ways for the draft Evaluation Tool:

## 1 Survey and submissions

From 20 October to 17 November 2020, the department asked the community questions about the draft Evaluation Tool, such as:

- How clear and easy it is to use?
- How likely it would be used to evaluate public space?
- How useful the Evaluation Tool was at identifying positive attributes, areas of improvement in public space?
- How useful it was in collecting and tracking information over time?
- How effective the Evaluation Tool is in informing further planning, design and activation and building a case for long-term change?

We encouraged people to submit further feedback through submissions and to keep in touch.

## 2 Webinar

On 27 October 2020, we held a public webinar on 'Evaluating Public Space quality to help unlock great places'.

The panel included international and local leaders in public space and place excellence. The discussion topic was on how to energise under-utilised spaces to create vibrant and meaningful places, ensuring they are designed with people at their heart. Invitations to the public webinar were out on 16 October through DPIE Connects, a free webinar platform run by the department that hosts information and insights from planning, industry and environmental professionals about challenges and solutions. Invitations were also sent to industry and government networks through email, promoted on LinkedIn and the department's The Festival of Place webpage. The webinar panel discussed the importance of evaluating public space quality.

## Analysis of engagement

This document summarises the findings of both these engagements.

The results from the survey provided insight into how to improve the draft Evaluation Tool to incorporate into the final version. We gained further insights once we drilled down into the data for additional detail and analysis. These numbers are shown in this report.

The feedback from the public webinar provides insight into important topics for the attendees and what they believed needed addressing in the public space discourse. The data collected from the public webinar broadly looks at what professional sectors attended and key topics of discussion.

## Goals of the engagement

The goals were to:

- Receive feedback from the general public as well as industry, state and local government experts on the draft Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life
- Raise awareness of the value and benefits of evaluating public spaces as we re-equip our cities and towns during COVID-19 to activate public spaces and bring them to life
- Provide information and build capacity for the public to learn about and share knowledge on public space



# Engagement at a glance

“ Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. —United Nations ”

## We heard from the community in two ways

### 1 Survey & submissions

Feedback on how we can improve the draft Evaluation Tool was received via inbox inquires, letters, social media comments and an online survey

### 2 Webinar

Discussion with international placemaking leaders on the importance of evaluating public space quality

## Key improvements to the Evaluation Tool and Guide

### Key insights

### What we changed



1. Support for the Evaluation Tool

The feedback supported the value of the Evaluation Tool and Guide. The department will continue to promote the advantage of using the Evaluation Tool at the beginning of the planning process



2. Improvements for clarity

The feedback helped us to improve the succinctness, legibility, useability of the final Evaluation Tool



3. Natural landscapes

The feedback helped us to make clearer references to natural landscapes, open space and sustainability



4. The creative arts

The feedback helped us to highlight the significant contribution of the creative arts to help deliver vibrant and activated public spaces



5. Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities recognition

The feedback helped us to highlight the need for more recognition of Aboriginal culture and to be inclusive of more culturally and linguistically diverse communities by providing translated versions of the Evaluation Tool and Guide



6. Inclusive amenities and safety

The feedback helped us to include more examples of inclusive amenities and to focus on the safety of pedestrians



7. Sounds in public space

The feedback helped us to address the evaluation of sounds in public space and how sounds can be perceived as pleasant or can compromise people’s activities and experiences

## Engagement summary

during public exhibition from 20 October to 17 November 2020



**2,968**

DPIE Evaluation Tool Page Visits



**8,645**

DPIE accounts: Social Media reach



**244**

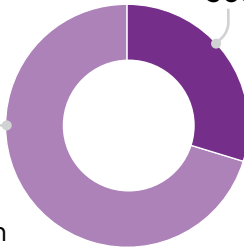
DPIE video: YouTube reach



**1020**

Total downloads from webpage of **draft Evaluation Tool**

715 print version



305 digital version

**835**

Downloads of **Great Public Spaces Guide**

**69**

Downloads of **Frequently Asked Questions**

**57**

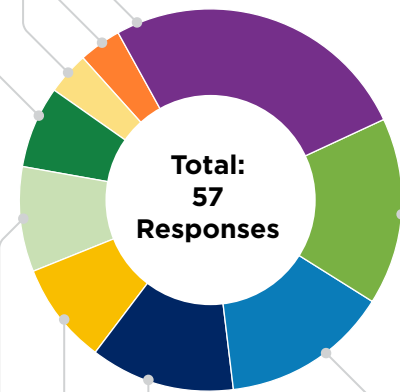
Survey responses

**11**

Submissions

### Type of professional backgrounds of the people who completed the survey;

- 4 Creative Industries or Public Facilities Manager
- 2 Project Manager
- 2 Education / University Representative
- 15 Local Government



### Of the questions answered:

**82%** of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' the Evaluation Tool as a useful way to collect site information over time for public space projects

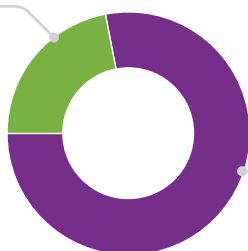
**78%** of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' the Evaluation Tool was clear and easy to use

**78%** of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' the Evaluation Tool provides an easy method to identify positive attributes and areas for improvement in a public space

**69%** of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' the Evaluation Tool would be to help inform planning, design or activation, and/or build the case for change or investment in a public space

**60%** of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' it is likely they will use the Evaluation Tool to help evaluate a public space

**22%** of respondents tested the Evaluation Tool on a site



**78%** of respondents did a desktop review





## Webinar engagement summary



**763**

Total attendees for webinar



**371**

attended live



**392**

additional people viewed the recording



**829**

people registered and were sent a link to the recording

### The top four discussion topics by the guest panel were:



#### Place attachment

loveability of a place, how welcoming and inclusive a place is



#### Co-creating with the community

sharing the power to envision and activate public spaces



#### The role of public spaces professionals

as master facilitators for the community



#### The importance of creating welcoming and inclusive public space

that values diversity, and the role of public spaces professionals have in guiding this outcome

### The top four discussion topics on the public chat were:



#### Valuing diversity and inclusion

validating stories and lived experiences of people with diverse backgrounds and lower socio-economic communities



#### Design expertise of the community

the vital role of meaningful engagement



#### The significant role of design and technical professionals

in guiding great public space outcomes



#### The importance of bottom-up processes

delivering successful places

### Type of organisations the attendees represented

Local Government	162	<div style="width: 40%;"></div>
State Government	89	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>
Large firm (10+ staff)	47	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>
Small firm (3-10 staff)	24	<div style="width: 5%;"></div>
Sole traders	18	<div style="width: 4%;"></div>
Other	13	<div style="width: 3%;"></div>
Education institutions	8	<div style="width: 2%;"></div>
Industry association	6	<div style="width: 1.5%;"></div>
Community organisation	4	<div style="width: 1%;"></div>

### Locations of where attendees live

Metropolitan Sydney	229	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>
Outside of NSW	46	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>
North Coast	28	<div style="width: 6%;"></div>
Hunter	25	<div style="width: 5.5%;"></div>
Central Coast	10	<div style="width: 2.2%;"></div>
Illawarra-Shoalhaven	9	<div style="width: 2%;"></div>
South East Tablelands	8	<div style="width: 1.8%;"></div>
Riverina Murray	6	<div style="width: 1.3%;"></div>
Central West & Orana	5	<div style="width: 1.1%;"></div>
New England North West	4	<div style="width: 0.9%;"></div>
Far West	1	<div style="width: 0.2%;"></div>

# What we did

From 20 October to 17 November 2020, we asked the people of NSW to tell us about their thoughts on the draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide. We did this by communicating and engaging with them through public consultation and a survey.

## Communication

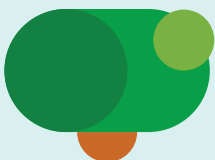
We used several communication channels to tell the community about the launch of the draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide and request their feedback. These channels included piloting with councils, webpage updates, a survey, public webinar, presentations and social media.

### Piloting with councils

The Places to Love Program is a collaboration between the department and six partner councils across NSW. The first round of partner councils in 2020-21 included; Blacktown City Council, Burwood Council, City of Sydney, Liverpool City Council, Penrith City Council, and Wagga Wagga City Council.

The Places to Love demonstration projects seek to improve walkable access to, and the amenity of, public space. The demonstration projects are a way to quickly test how to make public spaces more vibrant and active through temporary changes. Once complete, each council will develop a detailed case study that will be shared in the Toolkit and assists in building the case for long-term change for the project.

Before the public exhibition, the draft Evaluation Tool was developed and tested with six partner councils during the Places to Love Program throughout 2020. Burwood Council began testing and input into an early version of the tool from 2019. The use of the Evaluation Tool will help each council create an evidence base of quality, recording before and after the demonstrations, to support potential future changes and will include this in their case studies.



“ Council has been assisting DPIE throughout the development of this tool. Council and DPIE tested an earlier draft of the tool in August 2019 and provided feedback on this. We have been using the latest version at Hornsey Lane as part of the Places to Love Burwood Quality Public Space Demonstration Project. We have found the tool to be very user friendly and are very satisfied with the outcome. ”  
—**Burwood Council**

## Webpage

We launched the Great Public Spaces Toolkit webpage on 20 October 2020, which let the community and stakeholders know about the draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide. This webpage sits within The Festival of Place umbrella webpage, which was launched on 13 October 2020. The Festival of Place 2020 is an inaugural celebration of our connection to place and public spaces across NSW.

The Great Public Spaces Toolkit webpage includes information about the department's free resources for local and state government, industry, and the broader community to support more, better and activated public spaces. The draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide are the first resources in the Toolkit and more case studies, tools and guidance will be added to the Toolkit over time.

The webpage provides an overview of the Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide and includes a video, frequently asked questions, digital and paper versions of the resources and the webinar recording. There was also a section for users to have their say, which directed them to the survey.

During the engagement period, the webpage received 2,968 unique views. On average, each visitor spent 7:45 minutes on the webpage during their visit. This is considered to be an above average-high download and time rate.

## Webinar

The department held three webinars in October and November 2020 to raise awareness and provide more information about the draft Evaluation Tool and draft NSW Public Spaces Charter. One of the webinars was dedicated to the draft Evaluation Tool and the other two focused on the draft NSW Public Spaces Charter. This webinar encouraged place-based thinking and discussed the value of the evaluating quality of public spaces by local and state government agencies, industry and the community.

People from a range of organisations, including urban and regional local councils, state government agencies, planning and design firms, management and development consultancies, university representatives, industry associations, cultural, engagement and non-government organisations attended webinar live or listened to the video recording during the engagement period.

The webinars highlighted the collaboration between the department and international placemaking peers and our shared vision of unlocking under-utilised spaces to create vibrant, meaningful places.

### The webinar topic was:

**International panel: Evaluating public space quality to help unlock great places**

### Webinar Host

- Dr. Caroline Butler-Bowdon, Executive Director Public Spaces at the department

### Panel host

- Vanessa Gordon, Director Place at the department

### Panel

- Fiona Morrison, Director Open Spaces at the department
- Henriette Vamberg, Partner and Managing Director Copenhagen at Gehl
- Ethan Kent, Executive Director at PlacemakingX
- Nidhi Gulati, Social Impact Executive, Senior Director at Project for Public Spaces

The recording of the of webinar is available on the Great Public Spaces Toolkit webpage. See link below:

<https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/great-public-spaces-toolkit>

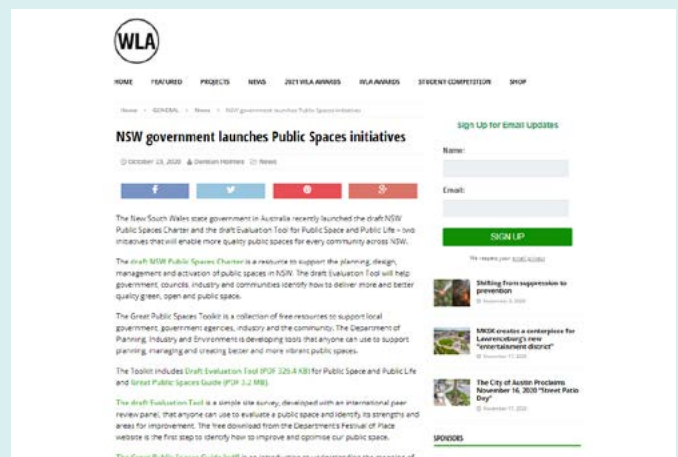
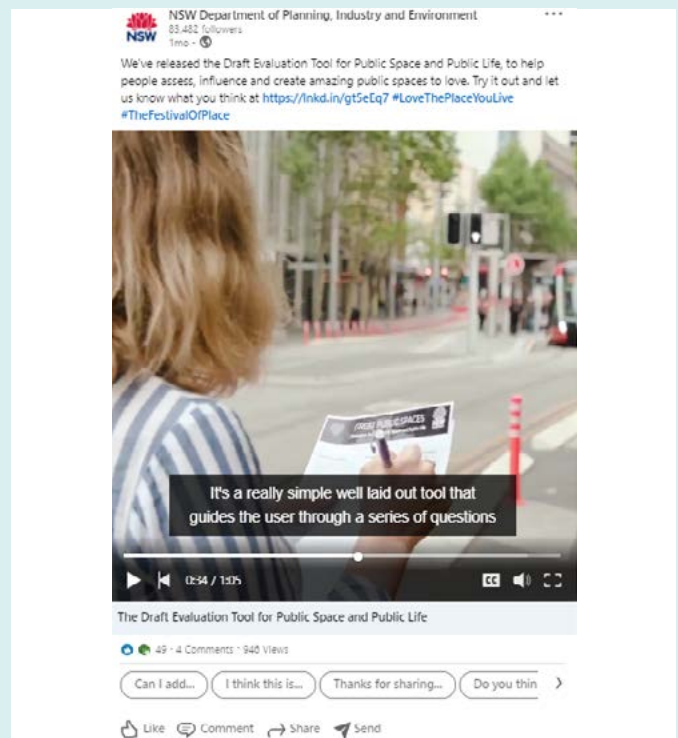
## Social media

From 20 October to 17 November 2020, five posts were published on the department’s Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter channels to promote the draft Evaluation Tool. The posts promoted the survey, webinars, the Great Public Spaces Toolkit and digital and paper versions of the Evaluation Tool.

The department’s posts received a combined total reach of 8,645 with 69 engagement. Overall, LinkedIn reached the most people 5,477.

Table 1: Social media engagement

Channel	Number of posts	People reached	Reactions
Facebook	1	1,074	7
Twitter	2	1,850	7
YouTube	1	244	1
LinkedIn	1	5,477	54



## Other media

The announcement of the Great Public Spaces Toolkit and draft Evaluation Tool also created traction with industry websites and two known articles have been published. On 23 October an article was published on the World Landscape Architecture website titled “NSW government launches Public Spaces initiatives”. The World Landscape Architecture website states it has over 50,000 monthly readers across the world. Then in late October 2020, the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council ASBEC published an article titled “NSW DPIE: draft NSW Public Spaces Charter & draft Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life” and a supporting Twitter post. The ASBEC is the peak body of key organisations committed to a sustainable, productive, resilient built environment in Australia. A further Twitter post promoting the Evaluation Tool was on Urban Affairs by Elton Consulting.



Image: Testing Evaluation Tool with Burwood Council,  
Credit: NSW Government

## Engagement



### Survey and submissions

The survey gathered input from the community on their views of the draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide. The survey was available on the Great Public Spaces Toolkit webpage from 20 October to 17 November 2020.

We invited the community to tell us how effective they thought the draft Evaluation Tool was and how it could be improved. The survey had 57 responses and 11 separate submissions were also made. The survey asked for demographic information, including postcode, age, gender. This summary of findings does not look at demographic trends in detail. The questions were mostly multiple choice, with some free text for ‘other’ answers or further explanation of a multiple choice selection.

The survey questions covered the following topics:

- Area of interest in the Evaluation Tool
- If you are completing the survey on behalf of an organisation
- If you had trialled the Evaluation Tool on a site
- If it was clear and easy to use
- Usefulness in identifying both positive attributes and areas of improvement
- Usefulness in collecting and tracking information about a public space over time
- Effectiveness in informing further planning, design, and activation of a public space
- Usefulness to build a case for change or investment in public space likelihood it will be used to help evaluate a public space

“ Council could use this tool in all future public spaces projects because it is an easy method to evaluate the quality and improvement of public spaces over time —**Burwood Council** ”

“ This is also a great tool for urban design, environmental design, urban planning students (etc.) to use in order to better understand the complexity of planning and managing public space. —**Survey respondent** ”



KEY  
INSIGHT  
**#1**

## Support for the Evaluation Tool

### What you told us

The draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide received an overwhelmingly positive response and 78% of respondents agreed that it provided an easy method to identify the positive attributes and areas for improvement in a public space. While 60% of respondents agreed it was very likely or likely that they will use the draft Evaluation Tool to help evaluate a public space.

Comments regarding the draft Evaluation Tool included;

- Helps the community realise their deeper expertise around the places they use
- Is a powerful way to start and structure conversations and build a learning culture for the community around a public space
- Is an easy method to evaluate the quality and changes of a public space overtime
- Is relevant for a broad range of evaluation applications
- Helps lead communities to develop their understanding of public space quality
- Is useful in understanding the level of activation of a public space
- Can assist community groups to communicate with public agencies and provide evidence
- Can assist the government and design professionals involve communities and build on their ideas when delivering public spaces
- Provides a standardised approach to evidence collection that can help build the case for quality improvements or could be used in grant applications to justify the investment
- Would be most valuable at the beginning of a planning process and will help people take a step back, listen to each other and appreciate their broader potential and responsibility to be constructive in the planning process
- Is useful for evaluations throughout a project lifecycles: before, during and after



Image: Test Evaluation Tool with Penrith City Council, Credit: NSW Government

“ The tool can be used by community groups to evaluate their public spaces to formulate advocacy initiatives or campaigns. The tool will help these groups communicate with public agencies and provide evidence. It can also be used by practitioners to involve communities in their work in meaningful ways and build on their ideas with recommendations and proposals for improvements ”

—**Nidhi Gulati, Social Impact Executive, Senior Director**

“ We will definitely use these as a new basis for other communities to develop their own tools and public space charters. Many placemaking leaders around the world, and colleagues at UN-Habitat, will find these very relevant. We would love to post these tools on a resource page of placemaking tools being used around the world. ”

We would proudly show them off and announce them as the first state-wide tools of public space evaluation and engagement ”  
—**Ethan Kent, Executive Director, PlacemakingX**



### What we changed

The feedback on the draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide consistently stated the value in the resources. The department will continue to promote the advantage of using the Evaluation Tool at the beginning of the planning process. Starting conversations early on with the community on what quality can be in public spaces can help make public spaces safe, welcoming and inclusive.

The department has updated the "How to use the Tool" on page one to greater emphasise the Evaluation Tools value and how it can be used.



KEY  
INSIGHT

#2

## Improvements for clarity

### What you told us

The survey result showed that 78% of respondents strongly agree or agree that the draft Evaluation Tool was clear and easy to use. A key objective of the department is to produce a user-friendly Evaluation Tool and Great Public Space Guide. The easier and more effective we can make the tool, the more useful it will be for the community. Respondents provided ways to enhance the resources legibility. These included;

- Provide more free blank space for ideas, observations and have more open-ended questions to encourage people to watch and experience the space
- Improve instructions of how and why to use the Evaluation Tool
- Provide more clarity around definitions of public space and what quality is
- Increase the space for the site map in the "Sketch here" section
- Improve the "Snapshot of people" sections as it is too cramped. The instructions can also be easily misinterpreted and cause double counting
- Expand the age cohorts in the "Snapshot of people." The adult's cohort was broad and didn't provide very compelling evidence
- Refine the scoring instructions regarding the evaluation questions
- Automatically calculate the average score per theme for the evaluation questions



Image: Testing Evaluation Tool with Penrith City Council, Credit: NSW Government

“ The Evaluation Tool will be valuable as it is simple and easy to use. The opportunity to gather data that asks about people's perceptions of public space could have many uses

—Create NSW

“ The layout and content are very clear. Perhaps you can:

- Add a third page as an observation workshop
- Provide more 'other' options to describe unique characteristics
- Explore layouts to create a better flow of information and improved visual accessibility
- Add flexible space on the tools with no agenda or expectation for people to use as they please. Flexible space can make an applied tool more inclusive

—Nidhi Gulati, Social Impact Executive, Senior Director

“ The evaluation tool is very easy to use and provides a good base for evaluating the efficacy of public spaces.

—Survey respondent



Testing Evaluation Tool with Wagga Wagga City Council, Credit: NSW Government

## What we changed

The respondents' feedback on how to improve succinctness and legibility helped advance the useability of the final Evaluation Tool. The draft Evaluation Tool was a two-page document, now the final Evaluation Tool has been spread over four pages, allowing more free space to write, draw or scribble thoughts and observations.

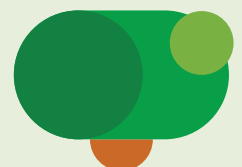
On page one, an improved explanation has been added to the *"How to use the Tool"* section, helping to set the scene for the user. A section on *"Public Space"* and quality definitions and has been added with links provided to the Great Public Spaces Guide and NSW Public Spaces Charter for more information. The site map *"Sketch here"* section has been enlarged with clearer instructions linking the task to the *"Snapshot of people"* section on page two.

The *"General"* information section was relocated to page two and it included a space to further describe the type of public space that was being evaluated, which helped give more context to the evaluations. The *"Snapshot of people"* section methodology was simplified to improve the useability and clearer instructions have been provided. These improvements included a generously sized tally space to

record approximate ages, with age bracket cohorts divided, to give more detail on the users' approximate age. The option was also added for the evaluator to either tally men and women or to tally everyone together depending on their preferences and project needs. A counting time has been reduced from 10 minutes to 5 minutes to shorten the evaluator time conducting this task onsite and an optional hourly estimate based on the 5-minute count has been provided with supporting instructions.

On page three, *"What are people doing?"* and *"What features can you see?"* sections have been expanded to include more options to gather additional useful information about the site. The *"Questions & observations"* section has been simplified and made more open-ended to encourage ideas and opportunities to be developed by the evaluator.

On page four, the scoring per theme has been refined to include a can't answer option that has no score applied. Also, we have created an automatic average scoring function for the digital version of the final Evaluation Tool, the print version will require the evaluator to calculate the average themselves manually.





KEY  
INSIGHT  
**#3**

## Natural landscapes

### What you told us

Respondents highlighted the critical recreational and ecological role of bushland areas, wetlands, beaches and rivers and recommended the draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide place a greater emphasis on these types of public spaces. Respondents also recommended more reference to the importance of sustainability, open space health and maintenance and the economic value of public space and maintaining biodiversity.

### What we changed

In the final Evaluation Tool, we have made clearer references to open space and sustainability. On page one we added a "Public Space" section including definitions describing open spaces examples; public beaches, riverbanks, waterfronts and publicly accessible bushlands. On page three in the "What features can you see?" section options such as beach/foreshore, wetlands/river/water and animals/wildlife have been included. On page four in the evaluation questions, the environmental benefits of trees, plants and grasses have been recognised.

In the final Great Public Spaces Guide, we also have made clearer references to open space and sustainability. On page three in the "Great Open Spaces" page, we have emphasised the need for sustainable, shady and healthy environments.



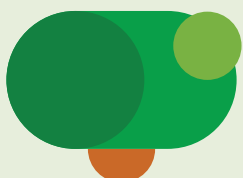
*Tomaree Head Summit Walk, Port Stephens, Credit: Destination NSW*



*Wentworth Fall Track, Blue Mountains National Park, Credit: Destination NSW*

“ We have bushland reserves that are accessible to the urban and peri-urban areas. This is a unique characteristic, as many of the large bushland areas have not been pushed to the peripheries. Therefore, acknowledgment of the role they play in providing recreational opportunities is critical as they offer a cherished type of open space recreation for the community. The abundance of flora and fauna is a key physical attribute - it aids in maintaining the character of the place  
—Central Coast Shire

“ This is a great initiative that assists local government in implementing public space projects.  
—Survey respondent







KEY  
INSIGHT

#4

## The creative arts

### What you told us

Some of the most loved and vibrant neighbourhoods are defined by the diverse artworks, local character, music and performance. Respondents highlighted that creative culture adds to feelings of place attachment to public spaces and that art, music and performance activations needed to be better included in the final Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide. Respondents also highlighted creative activations such as dance, performance and music during the day and night can have an enormous impact on the perception of safety and vibrancy of public space.

### What we changed

In the final Evaluation Tool, a greater reference to the creative arts was included as the creative arts significantly contribute to the delivery of successful and activated public spaces. On page one a "Public space" section was added and provided public facilities examples; public libraries, museums, galleries and civic/community centres. In these types of public spaces, the arts are also fostered and visual art, music, performance art and activations can occur.

Open spaces and streets also have the opportunity to be a stage for the creative arts adding to the unique urban fabric in our communities. On page four in the "Evaluation questions" section, an additional question was added to help evaluate creative activations.

Throughout the final Great Public Spaces Guide, the contribution of the creative arts was more clearly emphasised. On page one in the "Creating a sense of place" section the creative arts was given more reference as well as on page two "Great Public Facilities" and page four "Great Streets".



Light Houses, Vivid Sydney 2018, Credit: Destination NSW



Lunar New Year, Sydney 2018, Credit: Destination NSW

“ Activation of arts, screen and/or cultural activities taking place ‘after dark’ may change a place considerably. Arts and culture activities after dark - particularly music and lighting contribute to perceptions of safety and vibrancy (in public space). Spaces that enable the live performance of dance and theatre, visual artists working in public, all add excitement and social engagement opportunities. ”  
—Create NSW

“ Arts and culture can innovatively respond to the needs of community when delivering projects in public spaces. ”  
—Survey respondent



KEY  
INSIGHT  
**#5**

## Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities recognition

### What you told us

Respondents recognised the Public Spaces Division document, the NSW Public Spaces Charter discussed the importance of acknowledging and valuing Aboriginal cultural knowledge regarding public space. However, respondents suggested providing more focus on acknowledgement and respecting Aboriginal history and culture in the final Great Public Spaces Guide and Evaluation Tool. Respondents also identified it would be valuable to the community to provide translated versions of the Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide for culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD).

“ The tool can be useful in helping people realising their deeper expertise around the places they regularly use, but also to listen deeply to the experience and the expertise of others that use the space —**Nidhi Gulati, Social Impact Executive, Senior Director** ”

“ These tools can be a powerful way to start a conversation and build a learning culture, and community, around a public space and across NSW —**Survey respondent** ”



*Indigenous Cultural Adventures, Orange  
Credit: Destination NSW*

### What we changed

In the draft Evaluation Tool, on page four we include a question in the “*Am I able to connect*” section that references local stories of significance of First Peoples in public spaces. In the final Guide, on page one we included a paragraph on “*Aboriginal culture and place*” acknowledging and valuing Aboriginal culture and the significant impact on strengthening and understanding place. Then on page three, in the “*Am I able to connect*” section we highlight the importance of community stewardship and connection to Country.

Throughout the Guide, the illustrations by Gregory Baldwin referenced Aboriginal cultural connections. The “*Public Facilities*” page includes the Aboriginal language map of NSW and a sculptural fish trap in the gallery. The “*Great Open Space*” page includes a scar tree, a yarning stone circle, NSW native plants and animals. The “*Great Streets*” page includes a keeping place, which are Aboriginal community managed places for the safekeeping of cultural materials.

The final Great Public Spaces Guide and Evaluation Tool were translated into the three most common written languages in NSW other than English, being; Arabic, Simplified Chinese and Vietnamese. The translated versions will be available on the Great Public Spaces Toolkit webpage and will be promoted throughout Arabic, Chinese and Vietnamese speaking communities. The aim of translating these resources is to help enable culturally and linguistically diverse communities to access and understand the content more easily, as well as to help enable us to hear the voices of these communities in the conversation about public space in NSW.



KEY  
INSIGHT  
**#6**

## Inclusive amenities and safety

### What you told us

Respondents emphasised the importance of public spaces to provide inclusive amenities, as well as infrastructure to encourage safe and active travel. The feedback included the necessity to protect pedestrians in public spaces from all vehicles, including people riding bikes and that it's imperative to make this distinction for the safety of pedestrians. Further feedback included that in certain types of public spaces provision of drinking water, lighting, end of trip facilities, accessibility toilets and changing facilities can greatly improve a person's comfort and encourage visitation.

### What we changed

In the final Evaluation Tool, on page three the "What people are doing?" section included additional active modes of moving and transport and in the "What features can you see?" section more inclusive amenities were added. Inclusive amenities examples have also been added to the evaluation questions. These improvements will assist in the evaluation of public spaces and record critical amenities that contribute to staying comfortably in public spaces.

In the draft Evaluation Tool, one question in the "Am I able to get there?" section focused on pedestrian and cyclist safety. Now, in the final Evaluation Tool on page four, this has been divided into two separate questions; one question focuses on pedestrian safety from vehicles including cyclists and the second one focuses on cyclist safety from all other vehicles.

In the final Great Public Spaces Guide, on page three "Great Open Spaces", accessibility toilets and changing facilities as well as a focus on inclusive play spaces were included. On page four "Great Streets" greater emphasis was placed on safety and people being protected from vehicles.



Kensington Street, Chippendale,  
Credit: Destination NSW



Coco Cubano Café, Parramatta  
Credit: Destination NSW

“ These tools would be most valuable at the beginning of a planning process when people tend to jump too quickly to solutions or to their individual issues or causes. These will help people take a step back, listen to each other and appreciate their broader potential and responsibility to be constructive in the planning process ”

—Ethan Kent,  
Executive Director, PlacemakingX

If used consistently over-time the tool has the potential to provide a very strong argument as to why good design and management of public space is crucial to overall health and wellbeing.

—Survey respondent





KEY  
INSIGHT  
**#7**

## Sounds in public space

### What you told us

Respondents suggested the Evaluation Tool should measure and evaluate sound in public spaces as it's an often forgotten consideration when planning and designing urban environments. Respondents highlighted how sound is a significant factor affecting people's well-being and affects if they will stay or like a public space. Comments included positive sounds, such as music, birds, people talking and socialising at positive volumes added vibrancy and character to public spaces. While collecting evidence unpleasant sounds in public spaces such as loud traffic, wind tunnels or industrial sounds can direct improvements.

“ I like the question about “Who and what can you see?” and I'd also love to see a question about “What do you hear?” Sound is often a forgotten aspect of planning and design projects and it's an essential component for wellbeing. Sound also has a huge impact on why people tend to like or dislike spaces and places, so I feel it shouldn't be forgotten.

—Survey respondent



*Mudgee Food + Wine Festival, Mudgee  
Credit: Destination NSW*

### What we changed

The department received feedback from researchers on the Sound in the City team, a cross-sector partnership with McGill University, the City of Montreal and a wide variety of organisations. Sound in the City's mission is to make cities sound better. To address the evaluation of sounds in public spaces, a “*What you can hear?*” section has been added to the final Evaluation Tool. In this section, the evaluator records different sounds found in a public space and decides if they are positive, negative or not applicable. Listening to and recording sounds in public space can help unpack if the sounds are perceived as vibrant, pleasant or if they compromise people's activities and experiences.

On page four in the “*Evaluation questions*” section, an additional question was included to evaluate sounds from musical activations occurring within a public space.

Throughout the final Great Public Spaces Guide, we have made clearer reference to the benefits of live music and cultural performances including on page one “*Creating a sense of place*” section and page four in the “*Great Streets*” section.



Image: Sydney Festival 2014, Credit: Destination NSW

## Next steps

Building on the feedback we have received during the public engagement period for the draft Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide, future opportunities include:

- Continue promoting and empowering people, industry and government to assess their public spaces and understand challenges in streets, open spaces and public facilities
- Continue exploring cross-agency, local government, industry and university partnerships to support its use and wider adaption
- Embed the Evaluation Tool and Great Public Spaces Guide into the Streets of Shared Spaces and Your High Street grant programs and precinct planning within the department
- Release translated versions of the resources in the three most common written languages in NSW other than English, being; Arabic, Simplified Chinese and Vietnamese, to help enable culturally and linguistically diverse communities to access and understand the content more easily
- Design copies of the resources for people with a physical or learning disability to help more people access and understand the content more easily and be included in shaping their public spaces
- Provide presentations, demonstrations and information training sessions on how to use the resources with community and industry
- Develop new tools or guidance on topics suggested during the public engagement period that can be added to the Great Public Spaces Toolkit. Such as community value and inception surveys and best practice case studies of place management and design

The final Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life and the Great Public Spaces Guide were released with this report in March 2021.

For more information contact [publicspace@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:publicspace@planning.nsw.gov.au) or visit <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces>



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