

New York, NY  
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Page 1

## Press Release: A Mayor's Guide To Public Life

*Fostering vibrant and inclusive public life should be a priority for all mayors. Our guide shows you how to achieve this goal.*

**New York, NY:** Gehl Institute is thrilled to announce the release of *A Mayor's Guide To Public Life* with support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

There are few greater legacies a mayor can leave behind than investing in the city's public life: the everyday social life of streets, parks and plazas, and spaces between buildings.

With this in mind, the guide lays out the overarching strategies, tactics, and inspirational case studies for public space projects of all kinds. Leaders are encouraged to apply the tactics to projects at any stage in their development. More broadly, the guide shows how other city governments have institutionalized people-centered planning philosophies with successful outcomes.

"People thrive when neighborhoods are vibrant, inviting, and accessible to everyone. Quality public spaces strengthen community bonds, and create opportunities for strangers to rub shoulders. This guide makes the case for why public life matters, and it helps leaders achieve tangible public life improvements," said Shin-pei Tsay, Executive Director of Gehl Institute.

The benefits of investing in public life are wide-ranging: from improvements in health and safety, to increases in economic opportunity and civic engagement. Public life should be a priority for all mayors, because it intersects with so many issues at the top of their to-do lists.

"[Copenhagen's city leaders] worry about building the right kind of community to result in happier, connected people with a sense of civic well-being. They believe if you do that, the crime rate takes care of itself" - Teresa Tomlinson, Mayor of Columbus, GA

But where do you start? What does it take to enhance public life and how can a mayor and her staff make things happen?

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Page 2

Some of the answers are in *A Mayor's Guide to Public Life*.

To download a free copy of the guide, or request a copy for your mayor, head to <https://mayorsguide.gehl.institute.org>.

### 1. *Measure*

Knowing *how many* and *where* people choose to spend time in public spaces, as well as *what they do* based on their current options, offers a better sense of which design or policy changes might best contribute to a city or neighborhood's public life.

People-centered metrics enable an evidence-based case for change, creating buzz for projects and persuading skeptics to get on board. Such data can also reveal previously invisible or overlooked patterns to city agencies.

### 2. *Invite*

Citizens are often asked to weigh in on *how* projects should take shape, but this engagement typically takes place only after the projects have already been defined. The format and timing of this engagement generally caters to a narrow portion of the population and fosters an environment in which NIMBYism can flourish. By inviting more people to constructively participate in the planning process, engagement not only becomes more inclusive, but also more effective.

### 3. *Do*

Mayors have developed action-oriented approaches to producing real outcomes in space: starting with temporary interventions that build on what already exists but always working toward long-term, systemic change.

### 4. *Evolve*

Projects can be broken down into multiple stages, with each stage involving an evaluation, thus allowing the projects to improve over the course of their implementation by responding to previously unknown conditions. This strategy not only makes the projects more sensitive to dynamics on the ground, but also enables greater experimentation for designers, event programmers, and agency staff.

### 5. *Formalize*

While enhancing a single park or street is worthwhile, the broader goal for mayors should be institutionalizing people-centered approaches in government and civic society. Cities can be more vibrant, equitable, and livable when measuring and

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Page 3

interviewing the people who are most affected by projects is a built-in component of the planning process. Such an approach is not only possible, but has proved highly successful at the city scale.

“Civic leaders have an essential role to play in creating the kind of cities where talented people want to live and work and that allow residents of all backgrounds to connect with and learn from each other,” said George Abbott, Knight Foundation director for community and national initiatives. “This guide provides a roadmap for building more successful cities, revealing the power of public space to expand economic opportunity and create a culture of civic engagement.”

*A Mayor’s Guide to Public Life* was made possible through the generous support of Knight Foundation.

### **About Gehl Institute**

Gehl Institute’s mission is to transform the way cities are shaped by making public life an intentional driver for design, policy, and governance. We believe that in order to make cities more equitable and just, public spaces should be made more accessible and welcoming to more people. Our interdisciplinary work combines research, advocacy, and network-building

First launched in 2015 by Gehl, a privately held urban design practice based in Copenhagen with offices in San Francisco and New York City, Gehl Institute has set up independent operations as a 501(c)(3) in New York City.

### **About Knight Foundation**

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy. For more, visit <https://www.knightfoundation.org>.