

NSW Public Spaces Charter Core Values and Principles



The Charter is built on the core values that resonate across all the principles. These values should always be considered when applying the principles.

Core Values

Core Value 1: Connection to Country

All public space in NSW is on Country, which is at the core of every Aboriginal person's identity and sense of belonging. It is the place from which Aboriginal languages and cultures are derived, which determine families, kinship and communities. Aboriginal peoples are the Traditional Custodians of all public space in New South Wales.



Core Value 2: Equity and inclusion

Public space is a community asset that should support a society in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their potential. Inclusion in public spaces and in the processes to plan, design, manage and activate them is central to creating equitable public spaces and ensuring all people can access the benefits they provide.



Core Value 3: Community engagement

Engaging the community as active participants in decision-making processes when planning, designing, managing and activating public space helps ensure that it reflects their values, needs and aspirations.

Participatory processes, collaboration and co-design where community is genuinely included from the outset help build trust. This in turn increases people's use of and attachment to the space.



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The Charter identifies 10 principles common to great public spaces. These provide a framework to support the planning, design, management and activation of public spaces in NSW.

Ten principles

These principles do not stand alone but should be thought of holistically. The diagram below illustrates how each principle is part of a greater whole. Together with the Core values, which underpin all great public spaces in NSW, these principles can be used as a framework for future public spaces.



Principle 1: Open and welcoming

Everyone can access public space and feel welcome, respected and included.



Everyone should feel included when they're in a public space. That is, feel culturally, physically and socially included. People should feel safe, welcome and like they belong.

Public space should offer a range of things for people to do, including free experiences, amenities like seating, shade and shelter, end-of-trip facilities, accessible toilets.

Public spaces which feel cared for help people of all ages and abilities to enjoy being there, feel comfortable and at ease. Integrate public space with nearby land uses and public transport. Ideally, people should be able to easily get there on foot or by bike.

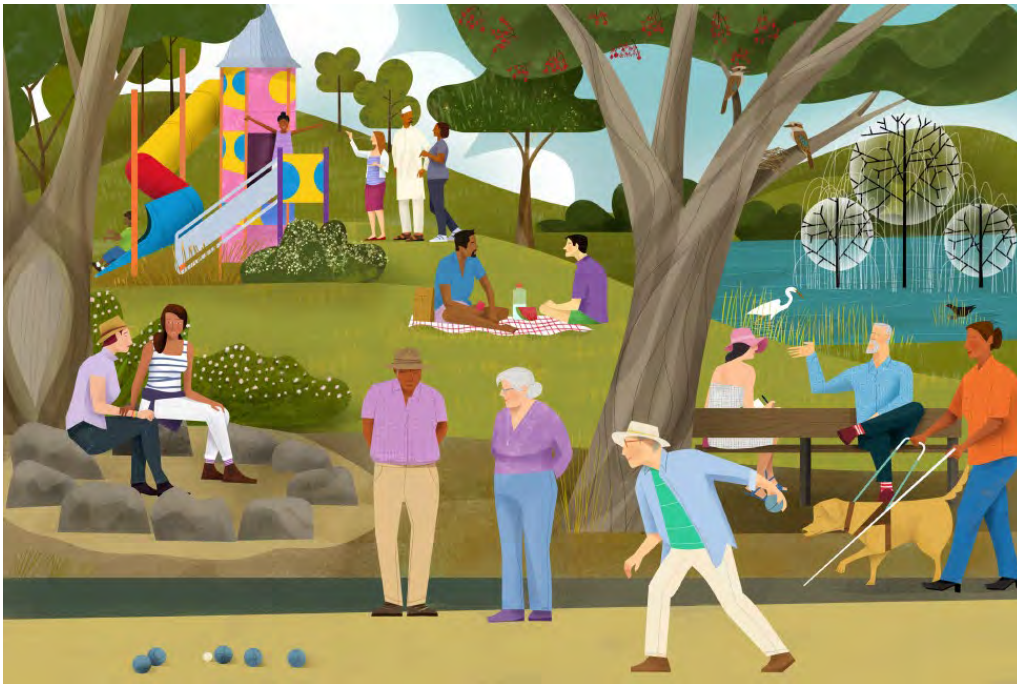
Not all public space can meet every need, but connecting public spaces together builds a network of spaces that work together. Public spaces should be flexible and sustainable enough to accommodate various uses.

Engage with communities to plan, design, manage and activate public space. Talk to a diversity of people, including Aboriginal peoples, young people, people with disability, people experiencing homelessness and culturally and linguistically diverse people. Try to engage people and groups who may have felt left out from these processes in the past.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Open and Welcoming](#)

Principle 2: Community focused

Public space brings people together and builds strong, connected and resilient communities.



Public spaces are where we socialise with friends and loved ones and enjoy social connections.

We might find ourselves side-by-side with people we don't know or sharing space and experiences with people who are different from us. This can help to create community relationships and networks of support that are useful when communities experience broader economic and social shifts.

Public space allows people from different cultures, ages or religious groups to connect and interact, just as it can between families and friends. Public spaces should allow free expression, collective action, public debate and opportunities for people of all backgrounds to feel they're part of their community.

Public space needs to be suitable for its community's specific needs and expectations. Involve the community – including people not usually represented, or not easy to reach – in the decisions about the future of public space. This will build trust and may ultimately create a sense of belonging and attachment.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Community-focused](#)

Principle 3: Culture and creativity

Public space provides a platform for culture and creative expression that makes places



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Aboriginal peoples should be able to access public spaces for any practice that connects them to their culture, Country and Dreaming. Some public spaces have difficult or painful histories and stories. If we listen to Aboriginal peoples and work with them to tell these stories truthfully then we can make these places for healing. Aboriginal peoples use ceremony, rituals and storytelling to engage with the spirit of a place, activate memories and connect with Country.

Think about how arts and culture bring people together – public spaces with a rich cultural and creative offering are more enjoyable and distinct. More people will want to live or work near these places and spend time there.

Public space can bring arts, music, performances and cultural events to communities and create opportunities for more artists, and their audiences, to express themselves.

Events such as concerts, festivals or ceremonies can reflect local histories and cultures, helping to bring diverse people and cultures together.

Areas in, around or between public spaces such as libraries, parks, laneways or town squares are ideal for temporary or permanent creative works or creative and cultural projects and activities.

Think about each place on its own merits, history and location, and involve local artists and creative organisations when building on the unique identity of a local area and community.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Culture and Creativity](#)

Principle 4: Local character and identity

Public space reflects who we are and our diverse stories and histories.



The many layers of built and natural heritage within public space create a sense of character, place and identity. This heritage might be evident in a building or in the landscape, or embraced in stories, memories and oral histories.

Public space should acknowledge and reflect Aboriginal languages, place names and histories and be a place where Aboriginal cultures can be practised and shared to create connections to Country.

Think about how parks, libraries, community centres, plazas or sportsgrounds can bring value to communities – perhaps because of what they offer today or what they represent about the past.

Maintain the character and quality of heritage in public spaces so that all generations will understand the history of a place. Think about how heritage buildings such as town halls, fire stations or hospitals can be adapted as exciting public spaces, while incorporating and promoting their history.

Local artists and creatives can get involved and create public art or creative programs that bring local stories, cultures and histories to life.

Engage across the community to reflect the diverse voices, cultures and histories when planning for the type of character that different public spaces might have.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Local Character and Identity](#)

Principle 5: Green and resilient

Public space connects us to nature, enhances biodiversity and builds climate resilience into communities.



Public space connects ecological systems and networks of green space, waterways, bushland and wildlife. These are places where animals seek food and refuge, and where native trees and vegetation should be prioritised, given their suitability to the Australian climate and soil conditions.

Aboriginal knowledge and land management practices support the health and wellbeing of Country – expanding these practices into public space can make them the perfect places to educate others about caring for Country to support biodiversity and broader ecosystems.

Green infrastructure - the network of green spaces, natural systems and semi-natural systems that supports sustainable communities – is essential to public space. This includes waterways, bushland, tree canopy and green ground cover that provide relief from urban heat, improve air and water quality and increase natural shade. Green infrastructure makes places nicer and quieter to walk around, while capturing carbon and reducing the likelihood of flooding and sewage overflow.

Public spaces can be essential to climate resilience, not least as fire breaks between buildings and natural areas, or to help mitigate flooding. They might also include community facilities that can – if needed – become places where people can take shelter in the time of crisis and disaster.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Green and Resilient](#)

Principle 6: Healthy and active

Public space allows everyone to participate in activities that strengthen our health and wellbeing.



Public space help people to interact and connect. They're where we go to play or get active, or where we might take part in a team sport. They encourage us to go out for a walk or a cycle.

Cool, green spaces, nature trails, river and coastal walks and bushland can benefit mental health, reducing depression, anxiety and stress and improving memory and concentration. While people should have access to public space to seek out the company of others, there should also be plenty of comfortable, quiet spaces to sit and relax.

When more people are regularly walking or exercising, it helps to prevent serious diseases such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and depression. This requires planning for wider, safer paths, well shaded and protected from traffic. Consider lighting, traffic crossings and traffic speeds that might make it easier and safer for people to walk or cycle.

In this way, we can also think of streets as public space – and think about the different functions of a street, not just as a carriageway for traffic or deliveries, but as places where people might gather, enjoy a coffee on the footpath or meet up with friends at the shops.

Always consider what children – and their families – need from public space.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Healthy and Active](#)

Principle 7: Local business and economies

Public space supports a dynamic economic life and vibrant urban and town centres.



Public space can include lively main streets, outdoor dining and cafés, and popular tourist destinations. They can be ideal for markets, food vans and live performance. These elements all bring activity, attracting residents, customers, employees and services, which in turn attracts business and investment.

In this way, think about how public space works with other buildings and other activities, so that people will form more of a connection to place. Remember that privately-owned spaces and commercial activity can work to support public space and make it more exciting, so long as this doesn't prevent public space from being free and accessible for everyone.

People might come to a busy street area to get some shopping done, access services or have a meal – town centres or shopping areas will be more likely to thrive if there's quality public spaces where people can sit, rest and connect with each other.

As a public space, a busy, active street will become a vibrant and dynamic shopping and dining precinct that attract foot traffic and creates buzz. Neighbourhoods become destinations, which spurs innovation and improves land and property value.

If places like parks, plazas, libraries, museums and community centres feel safe and welcoming after dark, the broader area might be more likely to become a night-time destination. Understanding how people use public space at different times of the day should be a starting point to make decisions that could benefit the local economy at all hours.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Local Business and Economies](#)

Principle 8: Safe and secure

Everyone feels safe to access and use public space at all times of the day.



People want to feel safe, and they'll feel more comfortable when there's a greater mix of people around – including children. Public space should offer a mix of uses at all times of the day and be well lit at night, especially along paths.

Crime-prevention design will make places and spaces feel safer, so long as this is done in a way that doesn't strip public space of its distinctiveness or the elements people want to enjoy. All people should be able to continue to enjoy the public space, regardless of who they are.

Work with the local community to understand any risks or safety concerns, including women and other groups of people who are more likely to not feel safe in public space. Feeling culturally, physically and spiritually safe in public spaces is especially important for Aboriginal peoples.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Local Business and Economies](#)

Principle 9: Designed for place

Public space is flexible and responds to its environment to meet the needs of its community.



Design multipurpose, connected and flexible open spaces and facilities that many people can use, for many activities, both day and night. By incorporating universal design, we can design places that everyone can enjoy, regardless of their age, ability and mobility.

Where possible, co-locate public space with other uses, such as education, health or cultural facilities. This might mean including a library within a community centre or creating open space near a school.

Design public space for the unique context, community and environment in which it is located, so that it serves the right purpose and suits how it will be used and who will use it.

This might require designs that can change to meet new uses or demands. Sometimes, public space might be used for formal occasions, other times for informal gatherings. People will likely use public space in different ways, so aim to design it for complementary uses whenever possible.

Think about how people connect from public space to the ground floor of buildings – this might see the public space extending into outdoor dining areas, laneways or surrounding streets. It should feel like a continuous network of pathways and experiences that are easy and safe for people to move around.

Engage early with Aboriginal Knowledge Holders, organisations and communities to make sure knowledge about Country is considered. This could include identifying stories or narratives connected to a place that can inform its design, or to understand key movement paths or Songlines that can direct how people move in and through the public space.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Designed for Place](#)

Principle 10: Well-managed

Well-managed and maintained public space functions better and invites people to use and care for it.



All public spaces require ongoing care and management. Often, many stakeholders are involved, and different interactions or relationships will affect the quality of a public space and the priorities for managing the space.

Look into public space management and governance frameworks that clarify roles and responsibilities, and the right funding models and collaboration tools.

Be sure not to restrict activities or behaviours that might be perceived as targeting those who have historically been excluded from public space, including young people, Aboriginal people and people experiencing homelessness.

Consider how to minimise long-term operating and maintenance costs from the outset. Technology-based solutions can be used to manage public space more efficiently and cost-effectively. People want to feel their public space is a welcoming environment – it should be clean, well maintained and repaired as required.

Aboriginal land management practices should be integral to all land management. The involvement of local Aboriginal knowledge holders should be a priority. This will ensure that culturally significant places are respected and protected.

The best models of stewardship are built on shared ideas and involvement. Through involvement, people become invested and more willing to maintain, program, beautify and advocate for spaces. Volunteer groups, local schools, sports and surf lifesaving clubs, bush care groups or citizen science networks are valuable community partners.

See more here: [NSW Public Spaces Charter: Well-managed](#)

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