Reimagining
the Civic Commons

Measuring the Civic Commons

Transforming our shared civic assets to foster engagement, equity, environmental sustainability and economic development in cities across the country.

Using Data to Illustrate Impact

As we invest in connected sets of public places around the country, we recognize the importance of demonstrating—with data—the outcomes of a reimagined civic commons.

We've designed a measurement system to analyze the impacts of these investments on the sites and in surrounding communities and to track progress toward our four main goals.

This data-driven approach offers a new method for determining the multi-faceted value of reinvesting in civic assets and provides evidence of the societal benefits of a connected set of public places.

With the data we gather, we aim to:

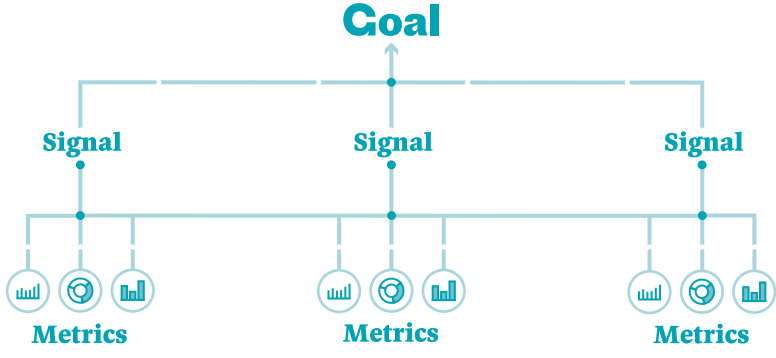
1. **Learn** how a healthy civic commons supports more resilient, less fragmented cities and neighborhoods
2. **Demonstrate** how investments in connected sets of civic assets impact engagement, equity, environmental sustainability and economic development
3. **Build** the rationale for further investment in revitalized and connected public places

How It Works

Our measurement framework is designed to demonstrate progress toward the four main goals of Reimagining the Civic Commons: civic engagement, socioeconomic mixing, environmental sustainability and value creation.

Within each goal are three to four signals: real-world indicators that relate to the project's overarching objectives. For example, the signals for the civic engagement goal are public life, stewardship and advocacy, and trust. That means if more people engage in public life, become stewards of or advocates for the civic commons, and express trust in others, that indicates that civic engagement is on the rise.

Each signal is associated with one or more metrics designed to measure change on everything from diversity of visitors to voting participation to perceptions of a neighborhood. To understand changes in safety, for example, we measure three metrics: perception of neighborhood safety, female site visitorship and neighborhood crime rate. In total, we are gathering data on 65 metrics.



Measurement Tools

The data collection process takes us into the public places we're reimagining and the neighborhoods nearby to understand how visitors are interacting with each place—and how the place is supporting a more engaged, equitable, sustainable and economically vibrant community. We also use publicly available data and in-depth analyses to evaluate the changes over time.

The tools in our toolkit:

Intercept surveys: Surveys conducted at the project site with people who are engaging with the place

Neighborhood surveys: Surveys conducted with a sample of community members in a specific neighborhood

Observation mapping: Visual assessments of how people engage with civic assets

Physical survey: Visual assessments of the physical conditions of civic assets and surrounding neighborhoods

Third-party data analysis: Assessment of data collected by outside organizations, such as the U.S. Census

We report regularly on the impact of investments, including baseline measurement, interim measurement, and in the future, final reporting to track the results of investments over time. An open-source toolkit for measuring the impact of improvements to civic assets is available at **civiccommons.us.**

Creating Public Places that Matter

More than places to gather and recreate, our civic assets are key to nurturing engagement, equity, sustainability and economic resiliency in our cities.

With renewing interest and investment in the public places that serve us all, Reimagining the Civic Commons amplifies the value of these spaces through measurement, partnerships and a commitment to continued improvement.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Reimagining the Civic Commons

The four goals:

Civic Engagement: Building a sense of community that brings people of all backgrounds back into public life as stewards and advocates shaping their city's future.

Socioeconomic Mixing: Creating places where everyone belongs and that generate opportunities for shared experience among people of all incomes and backgrounds.

Environmental Sustainability: Increasing access to nature and creating environmentally friendly places easily reached by walking, biking or transit.

Value Creation: Encouraging additional investments in neighborhoods so that they are better places to thrive.

Measuring Our Impact

We've designed our metrics to measure what matters most in our civic commons: impact on people's lives.

From diversity of visitors to trust in our institutions and each another, we're ensuring our investments are making a difference.

Goal: Civic Engagement

Signal: Public Life

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Civic commons visitorship	Average hourly visitorship of the sites.	Observation map
Frequency of visits to the civic commons	Percent of respondents who say they visit the sites at least weekly.	Intercept survey
Length of average visit to the civic commons	Percent of site visitors who say they spend at least 30 minutes in the sites when they visit.	Intercept survey
Frequency of visits to public places	Percent of respondents who visit a public place such as a park, library or community center at least once a week.	Neighborhood survey
Regular programming of the civic commons	Average number of hours of weekly programming at sites.	Internet research

Signal: Stewardship & Advocacy

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Acts of stewardship or advocacy	Percent of respondents participating in stewardship or advocacy relating to the sites.	Intercept survey
Support for public spending on the civic commons	Percent of respondents who support increased government spending to fund civic assets.	Intercept survey; neighborhood survey
Neighborhood voter turnout	Percent of the citizen voting age population in the neighborhood that turned out for the last local election.	County elections data; Census Bureau population estimates
Importance of civic commons sites	Percent of respondents who say the sites are important to either them, their community or the city.	Intercept survey
Support for public policies for the civic commons	Percent of respondents who would be more likely to support a politician who advocates for policies to better support civic assets.	Neighborhood survey

Signal: Trust

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Trust in others	Percent of respondents who say that most people can be trusted.	Intercept survey; neighborhood survey
Trust in local government	Percent of respondents who think they can trust the local government in their city to do what is right almost always or most of the time.	Neighborhood survey
Trust in local institutions	Percent of respondents who think they can trust local institutions to do what is best for the local community almost always or most of the time.	Neighborhood survey
Physical markers of distrust in the neighborhood	Percent of parcels showing signs of defensive measures.	Physical survey

Goal: Socioeconomic Mixing

Signal: Mixing on Site

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Income diversity of site visitors	Probability that any two individuals selected at random will be from the same income group. 80 is most diverse, 0 is least.	Intercept survey
Racial and ethnic diversity of site visitors	Probability that any two individuals selected at random will be from the same racial or ethnic group. 80 is most diverse, 0 is least.	Intercept survey
Citywide site vistorship	Percent of city-resident site visitors who report living outside of the neighborhood.	Intercept survey
Opportunities for impromptu interactions in the civic commons	Percent of site visitors within conversational distance of one another.	Observation map

Signal: Reputation

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Perceptions of the neighborhood and its future	Percent of respondents who feel neighborhood has changed for the better.	Intercept survey; neighborhood survey
Public perceptions of sites and of the neighborhood	Percent of local news articles with positive narrative about the sites and the neighborhood.	Monitoring of local news sources
Impact of sites on the neighborhood	Percent of respondents who say the sites have a positive impact on the neighborhood.	Neighborhood survey
Awareness of sites	Percent of respondents who have visited the sites.	Neighborhood survey

Signal: Bridging Social Capital

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Time spent with neighbors	Percent of respondents who say they socialize with people who live in their neighborhood at least once a week.	Neighborhood survey
Opportunities for meeting new people in the civic commons	Percent of site visitors making new acquaintances in the sites.	Intercept survey
Diversity of neighborhood social networks	Percent of respondents with highly diverse social networks.	Neighborhood survey

Signal: Neighborhood Diversity

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Income diversity of neighborhood residents	Probability that any two individuals selected at random will be from the same income group. 80 is most diverse, 0 is least.	American Community Survey
Racial and ethnic diversity of neighborhood residents	Probability that any two individuals selected at random will be from the same racial/ethnic group. 80 is most diverse, 0 is least.	American Community Survey

Goal: Environmental Sustainability

Signal: Access to Nature

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Distance to park or public open space	Percent of residential parcels in the study area that are within a half mile walk of a park or public open space.	Physical survey
Perception of access to nature	Percent of respondents who say they live within walking distance of a park, trail, playground or public garden.	Neighborhood survey
ParkScore®	Citywide analysis of an effective park system. 100 is most effective, 0 is least.	The Trust for Public Land
Citywide investment in parks	Total public spending on parks and recreation per resident.	The Trust for Public Land

Signal: Ecological Indicators

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Tree canopy	Percent of neighborhood covered by tree canopy.	i-Tree Canopy by the USDA Forest Service
Tree count	Number of trees in civic commons sites.	Physical survey, demonstration team tracker; i-Tree Canopy by the USDA Forest Service
Neighborhood carbon dioxide sequestered annually	Tons of carbon dioxide sequestered annually in trees located in the civic commons neighborhood.	i-Tree
Site carbon dioxide sequestered annually	Tons of carbon dioxide sequestered annually in trees located in the civic commons site area.	i-Tree
Perception of street trees	Percent of respondents who say street trees are beneficial to the neighborhood.	Neighborhood survey
Sustainable materials	Quantity of sustainable materials incorporated in site design.	Demonstration team tracker
Stormwater management	Total square footage of stormwater features on neighborhood streets and in sites including basins, native plantings and impervious surfaces.	Demonstration team tracker

Signal: Walkability/Bikeability

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Neighborhood walking behavior	Percent of respondents who say they take at least some non-work trips by foot.	Neighborhood survey
Neighborhood biking behavior	Percent of respondents who say they take at least some non-work trips by bike.	Neighborhood survey
Walking, biking and transit access to the civic commons	Percent of respondents who say they walked, biked or took transit to the sites.	Intercept survey
Neighborhood walking infrastructure	Percent of neighborhood intersections that include controlled pedestrian crossings.	Physical survey
Neighborhood biking infrastructure	Percent of neighborhood street length that includes bike lanes (dedicated or shared).	Physical survey
Neighborhood Walk Score	Index of walkability, based on distance to common destinations including parks, schools, stores, restaurants and similar amenities. 100 is most walkable, 0 is least.	Redfin
Neighborhood Bike Score	Index of bike access, based on bike facilities and share of the population using bikes. 100 is most bike-friendly, 0 is least.	Redfin
Neighborhood Transit Score	Index of transit access, based on number of stops and frequency of transit service in the area. 100 is most transit served, 0 is least.	Redfin

Goal: Value Creation

Signal: Safety

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Perception of neighborhood safety	Percent of respondents who say they feel safe in the neighborhood.	Intercept survey; neighborhood survey
Female site visitorship	Percent of site visitors who are female.	Observation map
Neighborhood crime rate	Reported crimes per 1,000 residents in the neighborhood.	Local police departments

Signal: Retail Activity

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Storefronts	Number of local customer-facing retail and service businesses located in the neighborhood.	Reference USA business database
Commercial property vacancy	Percent of commercial buildings in the neighborhood that appear vacant.	Physical survey
Independent businesses	Share of neighborhood restaurants that are not part of one of the nation's 300 largest restaurant chains.	Reference USA business database

Signal: Real Estate Value & Affordability

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Home values	Median and lower quartile values of owner-occupied homes in the neighborhood.	American Community Survey
Neighborhood building conditions	Percent of buildings that appear in good or excellent condition.	Physical survey
Owner-occupied share	Percent of housing units in the neighborhood owned by their occupants.	American Community Survey
Neighborhood rents	Median and lower quartile gross rent paid by renter households in the neighborhood.	American Community Survey
Cost burdened renters	Percent of renter households spending more than 30 percent of income on rent.	American Community Survey
Residential property vacancy	Percent of residential properties in the neighborhood that appear vacant.	Physical survey
Underutilized land	Percent of parcels in the neighborhood that are vacant lots or surface parking.	Physical survey

Neighborhood Economic Measures

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE
Population	Total resident population in the neighborhood.	American Community Survey
Poverty rate	Percent of households in the neighborhood living below the poverty line.	American Community Survey
Median household income	Income of the typical, 50th percentile, household in the neighborhood.	American Community Survey
Per capita income	Average income on a per person basis.	American Community Survey
Unemployment rate	Percent of the total labor force that is unemployed and looking for work.	American Community Survey
Four-year college attainment rate	Percent of neighborhood residents 25 and older who have completed at least a four-year college degree.	American Community Survey