

To City Agencies

Your work is critical in ensuring our City's services reach not just the wealthiest neighborhoods, but all of New York, and that they reflect the creativity and innovative spirit unique to our city. In order to support local visions for public space, we need city agencies, including DOT, SBS, Parks, SAPO, DCP, and many others, to work closely with City Hall and the proposed Fund for the Public Realm to streamline the regulatory system and build true partnerships between government and local leaders.

Drawing on models like the City Parks Foundation, the Fund for the Public Realm could collect and reinvest resources from the private, public, and philanthropic sectors into local visions for public space. This nonprofit can be governed by place-based organizations, citywide advocates and programming partners, with representation from city agencies. The Fund can incubate public space projects in low-income neighborhoods, offer shared services to increase the capacity of local organizations across the city, and advance citywide advocacy through innovative multi-year pilots and partnerships. As part of this effort, we invite you to:

1. Build a new partnership model between city government and local leaders to ease burdens and enable creativity in the public realm. Work with City Hall to pilot this mutually beneficial operational partnership model, which could include:

- Baseline public funding to community-based organizations activating the public realm
- Equitable contracting practices for nonprofit partners that include

advance payments, deliverable-based payments, and other practices common with for-profit vendors

- A fund for small-scale capital improvements (e.g. power access, water access, lighting, planting) that CBOs could apply to based on visioning and programming needs
- A fund for liability insurance for small CBOs to ease financial burdens on organizations looking to manage installations and program public space
- Expansion of current assessment and visioning programs, like the SBS Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA), with additional long-term funding for implementation and stewardship phases
- Expansion of the existing public space permitting toolkit—like DOT's Arterventions, Open Streets, and Plaza programs, and Parks' Art in the Parks initiative—to include creative public space activations, such as multi-functional stages, kiosks, and other functional amenities

2. Streamline regulatory frameworks to better serve CBO partners. Work with City Hall to improve systems across agencies for neighborhood organizations to activate and improve their public spaces. Ideas for innovation include:

- A regulatory interface that allows CBOs to better navigate permitting and licensing processes, including a digital tool that can adequately respond to public space needs and inquiries related to all city agencies, including SAPO, NYPD, and others
- Streamlined processes with DOT, Parks and utility companies to enable easier access to lighting and power
- More pathways for neighborhood-led public space ideas to feed into the capital investment pipeline

3. Expand and coordinate capacity building endeavors to more holistically serve CBO needs. Work with the proposed Fund for the Public Realm, City Hall and citywide service organizations to:

- Connect CBOs to a network of vetted pro-bono and low-bono service providers and vendors offering legal assistance, public relations and storytelling, human resources, fundraising, volunteer management, high-quality translation and interpretation, and other functional services
- Host recurring, accessible, multilingual trainings to orient community members and diverse stakeholders around working with public realm agencies, getting permits, contracting with the City and funding sources
- Publish accessible and multilingual resources on working with public realm agencies, getting permits, and contracting with the City

4. Move from engaging communities to being accountable to communities.

Support meaningful community engagement practices that garner substantive input from diverse stakeholders by:

- Compensating experienced hyper-local CBOs and anchor institutions to design and lead accessible, neighborhood-specific community engagement plans that build trust over time
- Adequately staffing community engagement teams or partnering with nonprofits to execute meaningful community engagement
- Creating specific accountability measures on quality of community engagement, such as a rubric and evaluation process to establish a minimum baseline before a project can move forward
- Partnering with research institutions to investigate the impacts of participatory planning processes and positive outcomes in order to strengthen the case for increased investment