HENNEPIN COUNTY

COVID RESPONSE TOOLKIT:
Parks, Streets, & Neighborhoods

VERSION 2.0 - UPDATED 7/17/20
Created in partnership with Musicant Group
The response to the spread of the COVID-19 virus has caused widespread strain on our communities, families and individuals. As humans, our natural response to dealing with collective stress is to come together and to support each other in community. The need to maintain physical distance during the spread of the virus makes this crisis uniquely challenging.

As such, our public realm is now an even more essential support system for our collective physical, civic, and mental health. Outdoor spaces like parks, streets, sidewalks and front yards are among the most vital venues for exercise and social life, especially now. And yet, all of this must take place at a safe physical distance.

This moment requires us to find creative solutions to support the health of our communities by reimagining and adapting our built environment. We are now presented with serious challenges, but also opportunities to strengthen our communities now and long after the virus subsides.

This rapid response toolkit, commissioned by Hennepin County, is crafted to support your provision of safe public spaces that foster healthy and active communities. In particular the toolkit provides:

- Specific and creative ideas for how to use public space, streets, and private spaces to solve problems and realize opportunities
- Processes to implement those ideas
- Tips for how to overcome obstacles
- Messaging for internal and external parties
- Links to additional resources and case studies

As circumstances have continued to change rapidly, we have added new content to previous strategies to reflect the current state of affairs. To ensure we continue to be as responsive to community needs as possible, we’ve created a short survey for those involved with public spaces, parks, streets, bike and pedestrian transportation, and active living to fill out and guide future toolkit editions.

And, last but not least, thank YOU for all that you are already doing and will do to support the physical and mental wellbeing of your community during this time.
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Addressing Racial Disparities While Responding to COVID-19

While this toolkit focuses on the impacts on communities due to the ongoing battle with COVID-19, it also must be recognized that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), and that these disparities are exacerbated by systemic racism. On June 30, 2020, Hennepin County’s Board of Commissioners declared racism a public health crisis. The press release states:

“Due to racism, Black, Indigenous and people of color in Hennepin County statistically have poorer educational outcomes, earn less, and are less likely to own homes or have access to quality health care and jobs than White people. The board’s resolution was prompted by several recent events, including the Memorial Day murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police and the worldwide protests that followed. These disparities have lifelong impacts, leading to higher disease rates, including a disproportionately higher burden of COVID-19 infection rates and fatalities.”

Both organizations and individuals who have the tools to act in this time of collective distress must seriously consider how responses impact BIPOC communities.

Black urban planner and community organizer Dr. Destiny Thomas wrote a critique of closing streets for social distancing in CityLab saying, “their ‘quick-build’ nature overrides the public feedback that is necessary for deep community support. Without that genuine engagement, I feared that pandemic-induced pedestrian street redesigns would deepen inequity and mistrust in communities that have been disenfranchised and underserved for generations.” The ideas in this toolkit, as with any project, produce the best, most equitable outcomes when they are done with and not for communities. As practitioners, we strive to listen to our communities and to use these strategies to address those needs first and foremost, especially those most impacted by COVID-19.

For more information go to: https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNHENNE/bulletins/29366e5

Percent of confirmed cases by race

<table>
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<th>Race</th>
<th>Percent of confirmed cases</th>
<th>Estimated percent of county population</th>
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</thead>
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<td>38.0%</td>
<td>72.6%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Percent of Confirmed Cases By Race As of July 14, for updated data, visit https://www.hennepin.us/residents/emergencies/covid-public-dashboard
Research shows that public space and active living are not equally accessible to all, even prior to COVID-19. As you pursue these initiatives, consider how race influences access to resources during a crisis, experiences of criminalization in public spaces, and how histories of inequitable policies can influence elevated rates of COVID-19 infection.

There is no one rapid response strategy to address structural racism. This toolkit provides ideas to respond to COVID-19, but as with any project, the way that they are implemented matters. The following resources provide some thought-provoking perspectives and additional insights about how to best implement the strategies in this toolkit with the goal of not only combatting the impacts of COVID-19, but also the public health impacts of racism in Hennepin County.

- **Cities in the Time of COVID-19: How do we respond to anti-Black racism in urbanist practices and conversations?**
- **Urban Spaces and the Mattering of Black Lives – The Nature of Cities**
- **Anti-Black racism in planning & urbanism: a thread of resources**
- **Placemaking When Black Lives Matter**

“You can want open streets and want to hold cities accountable to ensuring new policies do not further harm communities of color. You can want open streets and want to prioritize the acute needs of Black and Brown communities that have been forced to show up for themselves in the midst of a crisis that has impacted them severely. Realizing these ideals in tandem may demand greater imagination and the decentralization of personal desires, but they do not necessitate competition.”

- **Ariel Ward**, *A Tale of Two Truths: Transportation and Nuance in the Time of COVID-19*

"Black residents make up approximately 13% of Hennepin’s population, however account for about 28% of the confirmed COVID-19 cases. Conversely, white residents make up approximately 73% of the population and about 38% of the confirmed cases. [Source: Hennepin County COVID-19 Public Dashboard for July 14.]

"Black residents make up approximately 13% of Hennepin’s population, however account for about 28% of the confirmed COVID-19 cases. Conversely, white residents make up approximately 73% of the population and about 38% of the confirmed cases. [Source: Hennepin County COVID-19 Public Dashboard for July 14.]"
OVERVIEW

With most out of state and international travel on hold for the remainder of the summer, people are eager to find other, COVID-conscious ways to explore and get away while staying close to home. Local communities can step into this void and create engaging “Staycations” for all ages while in turn supporting local businesses, highlighting cultural assets, and promoting active living. The development of these itineraries can help draw residents and local “tourists” this summer but will also be a valuable tool in the years to come.

STRATEGY 1:

Q: How can families and households have novel experiences within the safety of their own community?

A: Create itineraries full of local destinations, historical markers, activity recommendations and COVID-conscious summer fun.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

- Reach out to chambers of commerce, historical societies, neighborhood groups, cultural centers, visitors bureaus, arts organizations, and other potential collaborators.
- Define several audiences and themes. A fun outing for a family with small children may look different than one for empty nesters or young adults.
- Ask/crowdsource from local residents what their ideal “staycation” day would be, and craft personalized “insider” itineraries.
- Identify and map local destinations and assets. Parks, plazas, public art, historic sites, and prominent views are all great destinations to select from. Ensure that this material acknowledges the Native history and history of multiple cultural communities in your city.
- Organize your stops into itineraries based on theme, age group, geography, time of day, etc.
- With each itinerary set, create the route. Be sure to select safe walking and biking connections where available.
**PROCESS / ACTIONS (CONTINUED)**

- If safe walking and biking pathways do not exist for segments, consider enhancing these (see Strategy 5).
- **Create a guide to the itinerary.** Consider commissioning a local artist/creative to visually augment your guide. Having both an online and printable/printed version allows for maximum usability. Ensure it is ADA accessible, regardless of format.
- **Add signage at each stop and even along the routes.** Lawn signs (chloroplast) make for inexpensive and effective mediums. Signage serves to both assist visitors as well as promote the effort overall.
- **Promote the effort through all relevant media channels and local partnerships:** email, news outlets, signage, social media, etc.

**COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

- Creating staycation itineraries is a great way to drive more awareness and support to cultural, commercial, and recreational assets that those in our community - and outside of it - may not be aware of.
- Effective ways to provide COVID-conscious activities for those who are going stir-crazy and may undertake risky behaviors.
- This tool can be used after COVID-19 is no longer a threat.

**OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS**

- Intermix some at-home activities into your local outing itineraries. See these ideas from the HealthAdvocate.
- Explore online apps as media for sharing your walking or biking tours. Hennepin County with the Wayzata Historical Society created the Historic Downtown Wayzata Walking Tour this spring. It works best in the app, but is also accessible via the web. [https://pocketsights.com/tours/tour/Wayzata-Historic-Downtown-Wayzata-Walking-Tour-3951](https://pocketsights.com/tours/tour/Wayzata-Historic-Downtown-Wayzata-Walking-Tour-3951)
- Multiple options for walking tour platforms - 9 Awesome Walking Tour Apps

*Feature unique and creative things in your community.* Storefronts like this one in Northfield, MN can even be stops.
OVERVIEW

COVID-19 restrictions have caused many youth programs to be cancelled. These programs not only provide positive venues for youth development but are also essential services which employ many talented educators and caregivers. For the sake of both youth and their families, engaging and safe alternatives to traditional programming are needed. While venues like park buildings, libraries, schools, and camps may still be closed, communities should look at ways to repurpose underused spaces and leverage programming staff to take activities to where youth are living and congregating.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

The needs of youth are highly contextual, so engage with on the ground staff, community organizations, and - ideally - youth themselves to discern their specific desires and challenges.

Repurposing Existing Spaces

• Convert parking lots, tennis courts, or other hardscape areas within publicly owned spaces into areas for skateboarding and bike skills. Encourage these uses and provide onsite staffing if needed to ensure safety for all.
• If you have locations in your community that are providing free meals for school age youth, use these areas and pick up times to engage with families, provide programming, and activities for people to take home with them.
• Have street art contests using sidewalk chalk, lawn signs, yard art, porch concerts, or more!
PROCESS / ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

**Taking Programming to the People**

- Give bikes to youth, particularly those from lower income families. Pair this with safety and maintenance training as well as events like Slow Rolls and trips around the metro. Having access to bikes opens up new worlds to young people and fosters active living.
- Collaborate with block clubs to take youth programming to neighborhood streets. Close down low traffic streets to host activities where youth are (see Strategy 6).
- Create scavenger hunts within local parks and throughout your community. These can be created by city staff and crowdsourced, which turns into an activity within itself.
- Create or expand youth outreach workers. If such a program does not already exist, utilize staff that would have been onsite producing programs to be out in the community to engage youth where they are and inform programmatic changes.
- Re-imagine communications to adapt to a time when people are not coming to community centers. Double down on using social media to promote programs and as part of providing programs.

**COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

- We all need to stay home and stay safe, however we can still connect with our neighbors through our front yards.
- No matter your resources or your time, if your yard is large or small, grassy or paved, a friendly front yard will help create community, safety and connection.
- Many people focus on making their back yard an inviting space, but more than ever we need ways to safely connect to one another. Your front yard is an underutilized space that you can use to connect with your neighbors.
- You might be thinking, I don’t have the resources to make a friendly front yard! However, if you can do just one thing, put chairs in your front yard and sit outside. When people walk by, you can safely strike up a conversation or even just wave and smile!
- Use creativity to come up with your own ideas. We’ve seen rocks for kindness, chalk art messages, and custom lawn signs.

**OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS**

- Metro Transit lost and found bike distribution program
- Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board’s Street Outreach Team: [https://www.ycb.org/outreachteam](https://www.ycb.org/outreachteam)
- COVID-19 Related Afterschool Resources
- RECasivity Boxes - City of Edina
- “Chalk your Walk” contest - City of Eden Prairie
STRATEGY 3:
Allow Community Services to Use Parks and Public Spaces

Q: How can community service and aid programs that are seeing big increases in demand be best supported in COVID-conscious ways?

A: Allow (and encourage them) to locate in vacant lots, parking lots, parks, streets or outside public buildings.

OVERVIEW

There have been marked increases in the demand and utilization of community services. These services can struggle to find locations that are accessible, low cost, and COVID-conscious (i.e. often outdoors). Some of the most in demand services include:

- **Food**: donation, distribution and sale
- **Medical services**: blood donation, COVID-19 testing, pop-up clinics
- **Daily goods**: baby supplies and sanitation products available by donation or for-sale

At the same time, our communities are seeing underutilization of some parks, public buildings, parking lots, and streets. These spaces would serve as ideal venues for the provision of community services, if we can adapt our processes to meet rising needs. While some of these services may fall outside of what is typically operated or allowed at public facilities, each is essential for the wellbeing of the broader community. As such, they should be encouraged to locate within publicly owned spaces.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

**For building and land managers:**

- Create a task force of representatives from the usual approvals group. Do approvals usually go through 3 divisions before being approved? Have one person from each division sit on a task force that meets within 24 hours of a request being submitted. Streamline permitting processes to the minimum viable option, since most pop-up service operations do not have staff capacity to undergo extensive applications or review steps.
- Can an alternative structure be utilized? If the usual process for approving use of the space is too complicated, consider using an encroachment permit or other temporary use process that is easier to accommodate.
- Can you issue a special permit process that defaults to allowing non-profit driven activities to happen on public property while the facility (library, community center) is not open to the public?
PROCESS / ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

For park, library, and other public facility staff:

- Proactively reach out to existing food banks or other groups running community services out of their facility. Be as specific as possible about what you can offer to help meet emerging needs (i.e. our east parking lot is 60ftx200ft and could serve as overflow donation distribution space on weekdays). If they do not need your space, they may know of another group who does.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

- Our community members are stepping up to serve their neighbors, so we are stepping up to serve them.
- The importance of fast processing of any permits given the extreme urgency of certain services such as medical care and food distribution.
- The processes we have to allow activities were created for activities with heavy impacts, like construction. What are the impacts to the public good that need protection when it comes to this request specifically?

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

- Pop up school meal distribution for the Minneapolis Public School System - operating out of libraries and parks - Food Service Locations
- An Experience of Shared Humanity at YWCA’s Distribution Center
OVERVIEW

Now more than ever, we have an opportunity to show gratitude to older generations and demonstrate our commitment to their ongoing role in our community. Loneliness and social isolation are not new problems for older adults in our communities, but COVID-19 can make these conditions more extreme as people prioritize their physical health over the social activities that keep us connected. Other high-risk demographics, such as people with disabilities or auto-immune diseases, may also be experiencing social isolation due to health concerns. We have the opportunity to show them how much we care, creating new bonds that last even beyond the current crisis.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

For populations who require the strictest levels of physical separation, these digital strategies may be the best way to build connection during COVID-19:

- **Offer a pen-pal pairing program** through your usual mailing lists. Is the weekly book club not meeting? Offer to arrange email or video chat connections between members. Alternatively, post an intake form on your organization website and/or social media, allowing participants to select whether they’re interested in email, voice or video calls; how frequently they’d like to participate; and several hobbies or interests. Specify a number of engagements, like “you and your pen pal can plan to connect 3 times” so that people don’t feel overwhelmed by the idea. Remind participants not to share sensitive personal information about themselves (address, financial information), to ensure safe connections.

- **Leverage library staff or park staff to do introductory classes on using video chat on mobile devices** or computers. Connect with senior living facilities and other community hubs to offer this program.
PROCESS / ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

• Are library mobile devices like laptops and tablets going under-utilized? Consider partnering with senior centers/living facilities to lend or lease them to individuals who could benefit.

• Create a list of low impact exercise classes available online for free or inexpensively.

• Establish a phone line where people can call during specified hours for a friendly conversation. Alternatively, have participants register in advance to connect over the phone with volunteers. (Inspired by The Theater of Public Policy - see Resources)

At living facilities with larger populations of people who are limiting visitors:

• Put on a balcony/window concert with local musicians. High school pep and marching bands usually have parades at this time of year and may be able to have a smaller ensemble visit facilities while social distancing.

• Partner with local animal shelters to host a puppy playtime in the outdoor spaces of the facility. Allow participants to book a timeslot in advance to ensure they can safely interact with a dog. Position the play area so it can be visible from the window for residents who are not able to leave their rooms.

For high-risk people who are still able to attend programming outside the home, but who need advanced planning and support to do so safely:

• Ease the transportation burden by providing rides with park/school transportation vehicles.

• Reserve seats or time slots at any events/services you do put on for high-risk people who may want to sit further away from other attendees or attend the event before it’s open to the general public.

• Encourage participation in community support. Social isolation can be staved off by supporting one another’s needs.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

• We may be far apart, but you’re still a valued member of our community.

• Social isolation is a public health issue, leading to increases in risk for heart disease, stroke, and dementia, according to significant studies.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

• Active Living Resource list of exercises for seniors and adults

• Information on the challenges faced by seniors and people with disabilities during COVID-19 (Star Tribune)

• Daily Call Sheet, a program of a Motion Picture industry organization to inspire intergenerational connection.

• Example of programming that provides connection by phone - Phone-a-Friend event by The Theater for Public Policy

• New York City Program to Recruit Cab Drivers to Help Deliver Food to Seniors

Support people learning how to use video chat options to connect with loved ones. Photo by G.A. Pflueger

The Timbers of Shorewood in Illinois held an accordion concert for residents. Photo by The Herald-News

The Herald-News
OVERVIEW

As people continue to stay closer to home and stay active while minimizing public gatherings, there has been a dramatic increase in pedestrian and bicycle activity in the metro area and nationwide. MnDOT has found a 51% increase in such activity in April 2020 with regional parks and parkways seeing increases between 140%-300%, paired with a 70% decrease in car traffic. With these increases most pronounced at regional parks, physical distances between people are shrinking to distances not deemed safe for COVID-19 containment.

More space for pedestrians and bikers needs to be created in order to reduce public health risks and support positive behaviors in doing so. This strategy should be applied both to existing regional destinations to handle current demand, as well as in more local contexts. This in turn will create more safe and appealing places that reduce the need to seek out regional destinations for walking and biking experiences.

Q: How can the surge of public interest in walking and biking, as communities shown with elevated activity on parkways, trails, temporary street rededication, be sustained and momentum captured?

A: Create and expand bike and pedestrian pathways along existing streets; close streets and/or convert car traffic lanes to bike- and ped-only pathways. Keep these improvements in place for the duration of the pandemic and capture multiple forms of evidence of the impact.

Update

The creation of new and expanded pathways proved to be a well-utilized resource for community well-being and provided important venues for COVID-conscious activity. Now is the time to focus on locking in the benefits of these temporary adaptations. The key will be to build the case for their continuation through:

• Before and after usage counts of the pathways to show the value created and needs met as demonstrated through increased usage.
• Conduct in person and online surveys to gauge people’s qualitative experience of pathway improvements. Intentional outreach to get a pool of responders that is representative of your community will be critical.
• Consider purchasing or creating your own traffic diversion equipment (i.e. cones, signs, bollards), to reduce ongoing rental costs. Work to identify seasonal storage of items not in use during winter.
PROCESS / ACTIONS

• **For parkways and regional pathways:** Convert one or more lanes designated for cars into bike and/or pedestrian pathways. If the street needs to still have car traffic, consider converting it into a one-way street and/or removing a lane in each direction if there are 4 or more traffic lanes to start.

• **For non parkways:** Identify streets that have been in closed in the past for things like Open Streets, 5k fun runs, parades, and block parties as a starting point.

• **Try it for a weekend.** If objections arise around public safety, advocate for a weekend specific pilot to test the concept on a route, rather than a longer closure.

• **Create and connect loops.** Try to create pathways that are loops, connected to other loops (example: the Chain of Lakes and Grand Rounds). These are more enjoyable and get more use - at a safe distance! - than spur paths.

• **Connect destinations.** Connect useful destinations such as your commercial cores, parks, school yards, libraries, parking facilities, and senior living facilities.

• **Post signs along the pathway.** Create and distribute signage (yard signs in the boulevard will do) about which users can use which parts of the new alignment all along the pathway. Use clear, direct messages about how you want users to use the space and why the street is open.

• **Post information online.** Post information about the new network either as a website link or as additional physical signs.

• **Clearly mark closed lanes.** Delineate closed traffic lanes and streets using construction cones.

• **Consider one-way routes.** On existing busy pedestrian trails, consider creating one-way routes to direct the flow of traffic and reduce proximity.

• **Make your own signage.** If you don’t have your own sign shop, consider using lower cost alternatives to rented equipment, such as sand buckets with stakes that have caution tape between them.

• **Get input/feedback from residents.** Engage with residents about where they wish pathways would go.

• **Collect data, even in a rudimentary way, as capacity allows.** Perform user counts at multiple one-hour occasions. The [CounterPoint app](#) is an easy platform to track your count.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

• If we don’t provide more public spaces for people to do things safely in, they may engage in risky behaviors.

• Going outside is a good way to stay healthy and we can provide accommodations to be safer while enjoying the outdoors.

• Creating more bike and pedestrian pathways is a public health measure to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

• Initial lane and street closures will take place on streets that the public (and public works) are used to having closed for events.

• Signage will be placed at frequent intervals to educate pedestrians, bikers, and drivers.

• Local traffic and emergency vehicles will maintain their ability to access all areas as needed.

• Equipment that is easy to move and remove will be used, so adjustments can be made quickly. Changes may be made when issues arise, conditions change, or in response to community input.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

• [List of street closures for COVID worldwide](#)

• [Minneapolis Parks and Recreation’s Parkway Closure guide](#)

• [City of Minneapolis’ Stay Healthy Streets](#)

• [Streetsblog: How to open streets right during COVID](#)

• [Tactical Urbanist’s Guide to Materials and Design](#)

• [NACTO: Guide to Temporary Street Closures](#)

• [NACTO: Rapid Response Tools for Cities](#)

• [Open Streets Initiative (Populus Street Manager)](#)

• [Oakland Slow Streets](#)

• [National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA): COVID Resources](#)

• [America Walks](#)
STRATEGY 6:

Allowing Resident-Driven Street Closures

Q: How can we connect with our neighbors now that we are going out less and have fewer community events where we can socialize?

A: Allow small scale, resident driven, street closures that can go on for days or weeks at a time. Make National Night Out into Every Night Out.

OVERVIEW

While our communities grapple with unprecedented circumstances, it is important to provide space to socialize and destress. With still many of the common places and activities that would usually provide outlets for family fun and intergenerational connection closed or limited, there is an opportunity to fill those needs closer to home.

One resource that every community can leverage is their low-traffic residential streets. At least once a year on National Night Out (NNO), thousands of block-long stretches of streets are closed to through traffic and converted into places that support socializing, games, cooking, eating, and hosts of other activities. By using existing NNO precedents, residential streets can easily be converted into modest public spaces that can support resident driven, COVID-conscious distance socializing, physical activities, and entertainment like concerts and outdoor movies.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

- Create clear criteria, guidelines, and metrics. Create clear criteria for what streets are eligible to apply, guidelines for residents for these spaces while they are closed, and ongoing assessment metrics while the permits are in effect.
- Reduce/eliminate fees. Reduce or eliminate street closure fees for this purpose.
- Define permitted uses/activities. Define permitted uses and activities within the closed streets.
- Bring in community programming. Consider bringing programming that was to occur in public parks, libraries, and community centers to these locations.
- Announce to the community. Create a public announcement via email lists, Next Door, and other community channels. Be sure to have communications that are crafted and delivered in a manner that is relevant to all population groups. Also send out correspondence to apartment landlords.
PROCESS / ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

• **Delineate street closures.** Use and donate city-owned cones and signs to delineate street closures. If these are not available, allow streets to be closed using alternative barricades that residents can provide themselves.

• **Conduct safety/compliance checks.** Have local police and regulatory officials check in on locations to ensure compliance and continued access for local traffic and emergency vehicles.

• **Create signage for these spaces** that calls out the rules, safety guidelines, and a sense of invitation.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

• COVID-conscious spaces and activities are needed for our community’s youth and seniors.

• The safest spaces are those located outside, in close proximity to where people live, with ample space per user.

• This program is based on the existing National Night Out model of street closure and permitted uses.

• Local traffic and emergency vehicles will have uninterrupted access to all streets and residences at all times.

• If these spaces are not provided, then youth (in particular) are far more likely to engage in unsafe behavior.

• Social isolation for all people, but especially seniors, has serious negative side effects on physical health that escalate over time.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

• [Stay Healthy Streets](#)

• [Minneapolis National Night Out](#)

• [Play Streets Program in Los Angelos](#)

• [Open Streets Toolkit](#)

• [Managing COVID Uncertainty by Walking](#)

• [Rails to Trails Closing Streets Article](#)
OVERVIEW

From annual celebrations to weekly performances, events serve as the touchstones for our community and calendars. Unfortunately, COVID-19 makes most of these gatherings unsafe in their traditional configurations and has caused countless events to be cancelled.

This pause in our community life offers the chance to examine the “why” around the purpose of the event itself. Why was it started in the first place? Do the original needs and assumptions still hold? By rediscovering the why, empathizing with attendees, and reimagining the experience, we can unlock alternative event concepts and approaches that can serve the community during this time and bring new energy into the event once normalcy resumes.

PROCESS / ACTIONS

1. **Gather your team.**
   - Gather your event team and stakeholders for a few hours to re-envision your goals for the event and make a plan of action.

2. **Break your event down to its purpose.**
   - **Define your audience:** who is your event for? Certainly attendees, but also vendors, governmental bodies, community groups, etc. We encourage you to review whether your event has successfully reached attendees/vendors who represent the full diversity of your city. If not, note the missing audience.
   - **Relate to your audiences.** Once you have defined your audiences, progress to empathizing with them. What benefits are they seeking, what would they lose if this event didn’t happen, what are their fears and obstacles, what is worrying them, what are their expectations about this event, what investments does an attendee make for this event beyond cost?
   - **Map out your event experience journey.** What moments of interaction are there before, during and after the event, how do each of these moments achieve your “why”? What are make or break moments during your event?
   - **Define your desired impact.** Events can change how we see things after we go home. What could that spark be for your attendees, vendors, or partners, that impacts them after the event is over?

**Q:** How can we rethink our community celebrations big and small to make them COVID-safe?

**A:** Re-imagine the WHY behind your big and small community events to repurpose and re-energize them as COVID-conscious festivities.

**STRATEGY 7:**

Re-Imagining Community Events

**Empathize with your attendees**
PROCESS / ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

3. **Think creatively about how to achieve your goals.** After you’ve reexamined your event’s purpose, now it’s time to think creatively about how you can still achieve your goals: your re-clarified “why”. Some approaches to consider:

- **Rethink the model.** The traditional event model that draws people to a single location at one moment in time likely doesn’t work in COVID conditions, so how can event elements be adjusted so that they do?

- **Use this time to make your event more inclusive.** Invest time and effort into making the event even more welcoming for communities of color, older adults, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people.

- **Turn event features around.** Have the event go to where people are, lengthen the duration of the event to lower densities of people, enlarge the event venue size.

- **Reimagine parades as a mode of celebration.** Bring the party to the people!

- **Consider curbside pickup.** Consider if your event can work as a curbside pickup only. Items can be purchased online before the event, and attendees can sign-up for pick-up and drop off times or entry times.

- **Consider drive-ins and bike-ins!** Events like movies or concerts could easily go outdoors as drive/bike-ins.

- **Manage traffic and density.** Rethink of your event as linear/one way where attendees move through the event while social distancing instead of lingering. When able to have gatherings again, manage density with a ticket system.

- **Create virtual awards/recognition.** If awards are given, can those people and organizations be honored through signage, digitally, or in public art.

- **Set it off with a bang!** Fireworks offer a compelling experience for large groups at COVID-safe distances.

- **Go 100% virtual.** Assess if your event can go virtual and achieve all of its goals.

- **Consider cancelling/postponing.** If you can’t reasonably meet your goals, think through whether you should cancel or postpone the event.

**COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

- **Send out a community survey to community members and event vendors and stakeholders asking how people are doing and their thoughts on your event.**

- **Be empathetic in any cancellation/change messages to show you understand the impact of the event.**

- **Communicate with vendors, key event stakeholders first before sending out messaging to attendees, and be transparent and clear.**

- **Express that safety is a priority and that the guidelines from the governor will inform all decisions.**

- **Inform attendees that you are returning to the “why” and purpose of the event before you make decisions about moving forward.**

**OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS**

- **Virtual event Resources**

- **WHO Mass Gathering Resources**

- **Eventbrite Coronavirus Event Tips**

- **CDC Event Planning Resources**

- **Event Design**

- **How the Minneapolis Farmers Market is Shifting**

- **Drive-In Brunch Concerts**

- **Minnesota State Fair Food Finder**
Activating Front Yards for COVID-Conscious Socializing

**Q:** With people confined to their homes, how can front yards be used to create more social, vibrant, and healthy communities?

**A:** The front yard offers the perfect venue to support COVID-safe socializing, activities, and walking destinations. Create a vibrant, COVID-safe community one front yard at a time.

**OVERVIEW**

With COVID distancing requirements likely in place for some time, there are limited options to congregate with neighbors in our community. While the virus presents a significant health risk to society, so does the impact of the social isolation required to stem its spread. There has rarely been a more important time to get creative in how we create community to support each other and care for ourselves.

One of the easiest and most immediate ways we can safely foster social life is through reinhabiting our own front yards. Making just a few changes to your front yard with minimal supplies, you can turn your front yard into a welcoming community hub, where you safely stay connected to your neighborhood.

**PROCESS / ACTIONS**

- **Promote the safe use of front yards** through email and social media.
- **Use the Friendly Front Yard approach** and toolkit as a free resource.
- **Hold and promote porchfest events.** If many neighbors have porches in a certain area, coordinate a night of socializing and music, all from the comfort of your own porch.
- **Activate yard space in new ways.** Use yards as a staging ground for new communal traditions like singalongs, mini parade viewings, garden tours, socially distanced socializing, play areas, grilling, and more.
- **Expand little free libraries.** Expand upon the little free library concept to have pantries, cleaning supplies, PPE, and message boards.
- **Share creative messages.** Use your front yard as a forum for creative and inspiring lawn signs.
- **Mark the path.** Create mile markers along the boulevards to encourage walking and biking locally.
PROCESS / ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

- **Host movie nights/concerts.** Host front yard movies and concerts that bring neighbors together at a safe distance.
- **Up your garden game.** Encourage people to convert grass into more pollen- and watershed-friendly landscapes.
- **Celebrate great front yards** in your community to inspire others to act.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Here are some key messages and information to consider sharing with the public:

- We all need to stay home and stay safe, however we can still connect with our neighbors through our front yards.
- No matter your resources or your time, if your yard is large or small, grassy or paved, a friendly front yard will help create community, safety and connection.
- Many people focus on making their back yard an inviting space, but more than ever we need ways to safely connect to one another. Your front yard is an underutilized space that you can use to connect with your neighbors.
- You might be thinking, I don’t have the resources to make a friendly front yard! However, if you can do just one thing, put chairs in your front yard and sit outside. When people walk by, you can safely strike up a conversation or even just wave and smile!
- Use creativity to come up with your own ideas. We’ve seen rocks for kindness, chalk art messages, and custom lawn signs.

OTHER RESOURCES / TIPS

- Friendlyfronts.com
- Little Free Library
- Metro Blooms
- “Chalk your Walk” contest - City of Eden Prairie
- Friendly Front Yards Toolkit provides simple tips and strategies to activate your space
General Resources

The best of what we have found to help you navigate this transition:

**PUBLIC SPACES**

- [CDC- Resources for Parks and Recreational Facilities](#)
- [Minnesota Safe Routes to School Newsletter](#)
- [Rails to Trails Conservancy](#)
- [National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)](#)
- [Webinar: Who gets access to public space?](#)

**PLACEMAKING & DESIGN**

- [Placemaking for Main Streets Toolkit - The Musicant Group](#) A step by step guide to generate positive social and commercial activity for any type of commercial center. With its focus on process, it provides useful frameworks that can help navigate this time of COVID and afterwards.
- [Friendly Storefronts Toolkit - The Musicant Group](#) A step by step guide to transform storefronts into activity centers that support businesses and community life. Similar to the Main Street Toolkit, its focus on process makes it relevant for these times of COVID and afterwards.
- [Friendly Front Yards - The Musicant Group](#) The Friendly Fronts Toolkit will inspire and guide you and your neighbors to turn your front yards into places where you serendipitously meet one another while staying safe.