

ACHIEVING GREAT FEDERAL PUBLIC SPACES:  
A PROPERTY MANAGER'S GUIDE

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# SECTION 4

## Implementation



- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 EVALUATION
- 3 SOLUTIONS
- 4 IMPLEMENTATION**
- 5 RESOURCES

# Planning for Implementation

Once you have completed the Place Audit and worksheet exercises in Sections 2 and 3, the following steps will help you move forward as you prepare for the next phase of work on your facility's public spaces. Each letter below (A-I) contains a sequence of outreach techniques and activities. It is not necessary to follow each step in the order in which it is presented. Read through all the steps in their entirety first, then carry out the tasks that seem most appropriate to the work you are currently engaged in or planning to undertake. If you are currently focusing on short-term improvements, for instance, then the internal steps will be most relevant at this time. If you are considering medium- or long-term improvements, then both internal and external steps will prove useful.

## INTERNAL AGENCY-BASED IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- A. Develop an observation routine
- B. Compile a list of short-, medium- and long-term improvements from the Section 3 worksheets and from your daily rounds.
- C. Identify federal agency resources that can help implement the list of improvements.
- D. Identify the regulations and approvals that would have to be amended or obtained to permit or encourage the improvements.
- E. Match the improvements with existing funding sources available to you.

## EXTERNAL IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- F. Identify key stakeholders to include in the implementation process
- G. Engage with key stakeholders
- H. Expedite tasks that fall outside GSA's jurisdiction and responsibility.
- I. Coordinate with public and private partners on capital construction or repair and alteration projects.
- J. Create long-term partnerships

## INTERNAL AGENCY-BASED IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The first set of steps (A-E) focuses on working within GSA and within your building. You can do many of these tasks on your own or with a small group of staff and GSA colleagues.

### A. DEVELOP AN OBSERVATION ROUTINE

Property managers are uniquely qualified to observe how well their public spaces function on a day-to-day basis. The tasks outlined below will help property managers keep an eye on things, both systematically and comprehensively:

- Keep a notebook in which to track your observations.
- Walk around the property at different times each day of the week—for example, early morning when people are arriving for work; at lunchtime; and in the evening – after dark – when tenants are leaving for home. Jot down what people are doing at these times of day, where they may be seeking shelter, how they are moving through the space, what areas they may be avoiding. Where are people sitting? Where are they congregating? Watch people as they approach the building. Do they seem lost? Do they have trouble crossing the street due to fast moving traffic or a lack of crosswalks?
- Walk around the property at different times of year—when the weather is hot and sunny, when it is raining, and, if possible, when it is snowing. Note how people's use of public spaces changes in different conditions.
- Also keep track of the physical condition of your space. Make notes of outdated signage, dead plants, graffiti, burnt out light bulbs, overflowing waste receptacles, cracks in the paving, and so on. Make a list of things that need to be repaired. Identify “quick fixes” that should be made right away.

- Talk to your security personnel. Find out what questions they are being asked by visitors and tenants. Ask them what needs attention or what may be a problem.

**B.  
COMPILE A LIST OF SHORT-, MEDIUM- AND LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENTS FROM THE SECTION 3 WORKSHEETS AND FROM YOUR DAILY ROUNDS.**

- Make a list of those items that are the responsibility of GSA personnel. If possible, identify precisely whose area of responsibility and jurisdiction these ideas fall under.
- Make a list of those tasks that fall out of the range of GSA personnel jurisdiction and responsibility. If possible, identify whose area of responsibility and jurisdiction these non-GSA-related ideas fall under.
- Prioritize all the GSA-related short-, medium- and long-term tasks in one list; do not divide into segments based on the Action Points.
- Locate the desired activities and improvements on a basemap of the site to create a concept plan for what the changes will look like. This can be used to guide implementation of both short-term improvements and long-term changes to the site.
- To promote the idea of making public space improvements, outline all the potential benefits that would accrue to customer agencies, visitors, and neighboring businesses and institutions if the improvements were implemented.

**C.  
IDENTIFY FEDERAL AGENCY RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP IMPLEMENT THE LIST OF IMPROVEMENTS.**

- Select a group of GSA colleagues, including program officers as well as facilities officers, with whom to share ideas.

- Work with this group to generate a list of agencies to approach about assisting with the improvements.
- Approach the federal and tenant agencies you have identified about assisting with your public space projects, using the list of benefits from item (B) to build interest. By having your tenant agencies and non-GSA federal partners talk about the larger spin-off benefits to be garnered by your efforts, you build external support for these ideas among people who can assist you in getting them implemented among GSA “higher-ups.”

**D.  
IDENTIFY THE REGULATIONS AND APPROVALS THAT WOULD HAVE TO BE AMENDED OR OBTAINED TO PERMIT OR ENCOURAGE THE IMPROVEMENTS.**

- Select a group of GSA colleagues with whom to share ideas.
- Work with this group to generate a list of relevant regulations and approvals.
- Take the list to your Property Management Leadership Network representative to discuss at their next meeting.
- Determine how flexible the regulations may be.
- Talk to your Assistant Regional Administrator about allowing you to a) modify the rules or b) test your ideas to see how well they work and then modify the rules to allow them to happen more regularly.

**E.  
MATCH THE IMPROVEMENTS WITH EXISTING FUNDING SOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU.**

- Brainstorm a list of available sources to fund the improvements.
- Develop a timeline showing how the improvements can be phased in over consecutive funding cycles.

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*A number of people—key stakeholders—also have a working knowledge of your public spaces, which can help deepen your understanding of both challenges and potential solutions.*

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- Review the Case Studies later in this section for innovative, successful initiatives undertaken by GSA property managers.

## EXTERNAL IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The second set of steps (F-I) necessitates a broader outreach effort to partners and potential collaborators from around your city. One important thing to keep in mind is that the Place Audit can be used at different stages in this process. Whether you are developing an SFO, putting together a prospectus, or undertaking a repair and alteration project, you can conduct the Place Audit with your partners to generate ideas and shape a sound strategy.

### F. IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO INCLUDE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

As a GSA property manager, you possess critical knowledge about the public spaces on and around your property. But a number of other people—key stakeholders—also have a working knowledge of your public spaces, which can help deepen your understanding of both challenges and potential solutions. For this step, you may wish to form a steering committee with colleagues from your building and downtown area contacts. The committee can help you identify additional stakeholders and prepare to conduct the Place Audit with a broader group.

#### Who are your key stakeholders?

People who use your building and its public spaces:

- Employees who deal directly with visitors to your building
- Building tenants
- Client agencies
- Building visitors

People who affect the environment around your property:

- Owners, managers, and/or employees of nearby properties
- City agencies (Departments of Planning, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, etc.)
- Chambers of Commerce, BIDs, downtown associations, or other civic organizations that produce events and offer other services
- Owners or employees of retail establishments in your building or in nearby buildings

Potential partners for programming, retail, and other activity:

- Retailers that could locate satellite vending kiosks and carts at your facility
- Visitors bureaus to encourage a connection between downtown and your facility
- Convention centers and arenas to coordinate and program “before and after events” on your plaza
- Musical groups, such as local orchestras, choirs, or marching bands, to perform at events
- Public art commissions to provide guidance on selection and location of temporary exhibitions and works of public art
- Schools and universities to use buildings for exhibition space

### G. ENGAGE WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- Survey tenants, client agencies, and other stakeholders identified in Item F about what they would like to see take place in the public spaces inside and outside of the building. Ask about:
  - Everyday uses and activities
  - Amenities
  - Programming and special events

OR

- Conduct the Place Audit with representatives of all stakeholder groups:
  - Observe the facility's public spaces (have stakeholders fill out the checklists as a group)
  - Talk to people who are using the public spaces about their ideas
  - Identify problems and opportunities for short-, medium- and long-term changes
- Locate the desired activities and improvements generated by your stakeholders on a basemap of the site to create a concept plan for what the changes will look like. This can be used to guide implementation of both short-term improvements and long-term changes to the site.
- Jointly identify with stakeholders the assets and skills they can each bring to the project. For example:
  - Programs and events that highlight the mission of their institutions
  - Specific professional expertise (e.g. horticulture, theater, etc.)
  - Joint marketing and advertising

#### **H. EXPEDITE TASKS THAT FALL OUTSIDE GSA'S JURISDICTION AND RESPONSIBILITY.**

- Review the list from Item B of tasks that fall outside GSA's jurisdiction and responsibility, then contact the agencies, organizations, and individuals responsible for these areas. Call a meeting to present and discuss the list.
- As part of the meeting, schedule times to conduct the Place Audit with these partners on the publicly and privately managed spaces and properties proximate to your site to generate even more ideas. Use the results to generate additional short-, medium- and long-term non-GSA-related tasks with these partners.

- Combine these additional ideas with your original list from Item B, then prioritize all non-GSA-related short-, medium- and long-term tasks in one list; do not divide into segments based on the Action Points.
- Brainstorm available sources to fund the improvements.

#### **I. COORDINATE WITH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS ON CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION OR REPAIR AND ALTERATION PROJECTS.**

Long-term improvements pose their own set of challenges and opportunities. When you are about to undertake a capital construction or repair and alteration project, meeting early on with the city, redevelopment authority, or other agencies outside GSA will enable you to determine opportunities to leverage your project and receive additional or higher-standard design features, amenities, or services in exchange. Use the following steps as a guide to successful collaboration and partnership building.

- Meet with staff from city agencies in charge of infrastructure outside GSA's jurisdiction that you would like to see improved (sidewalks, streets, transit facilities, non-GSA public spaces) and present the long-term changes generated by your stakeholders from Item H.
- Ask the city to identify repair, replacement, or capital construction projects they are already executing or planning for the areas proximate to your building. For a GSA property manager, becoming familiar with the master plans, studies, and city initiatives for the areas immediately adjacent to your facility and in the city at large is crucial, providing a 'window of opportunity' to effect changes that would otherwise be unworkable or too costly. Likewise, a GSA project can provide an impetus for the city to modify development plans for adjacent properties to benefit GSA clients and the community at large.

- Meet with the developers and owners of private properties and present the long-term improvements from Item H. Determine what private development is planned for the blocks surrounding your building as well.
- Develop a strategy for making improvements to your property that will dovetail with the work planned by the city and private sector.
- Include the city’s concerns and plans in the FedBizOpps announcement so that bidders have an opportunity to address and incorporate city design guidelines and standards in their proposals from the start.
- Prioritize and develop a phasing plan for the improvements based on funding availability and the public and private sector projects planned or underway in your area.
- If necessary, conduct a master planning effort for a new site, and include the city in the process.
- Contact First Impressions Architecture and Landscape Architecture IDIQ firms to assist you with a more formal planning process or any step under items I and J.

**J.  
CREATE LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS**

If no expansion or repair and alteration project is planned for the immediate future, but GSA or any of its public and private partners foresees the need for a major capital improvement in five or ten years’ time, it is still a good idea to share plans as soon as possible. The following steps will help you sustain good working relationships with your long-term partners.

- Convene public and private partners to discuss the broader, long-term goals of each stakeholder. Present GSA’s future site development/redevelopment plans, no matter what stage the ideas are in.
- Brainstorm areas of overlapping goals and opportunities for cooperation.
- Identify potential points of conflict that will need to be resolved, keeping in mind the larger, long-term goals of the collective effort.

# Eleven Principles For Turning Federal Spaces Into Great Civic Places

The following principles provide a framework for achieving GSA's Public Space Goals, applying the Action Points, and implementing the solutions described in the earlier sections of this guide. As you go forward with the process of improving your facility's public spaces, keeping these principles in mind will increase your chances for success.

Although every public space has different features, resources, constraints, and stakeholders, the approach to maximizing their potential is similar. Certain situations and challenges affect every GSA public space project, and the principles offer ways to solve these common problems and implement solutions effectively from the outset of the process. Whether building or renovating facilities to meet core business goals—or even working with community partners to address client concerns about a facility's surroundings—the principles offer useful concepts and techniques that can be applied to any GSA project that affects public space.

## 1. THE COMMUNITY IS THE EXPERT

To create a successful place, it is essential to address the concerns, desires, and talents of the people who will use it. Tapping into the ideas and talents of a community—that is, those who have a stake in a particular place—is crucial in deciding how to improve an existing place or develop a vision for a new place. The people who live or work in an area know from experience which areas are dangerous and why, which spaces are comfortable for lunching outside, in which location the traffic moves too fast, and where children can safely walk, bike or play. They provide perspective and valuable insights into how an area functions; overall, they have a unique understanding of the issues that are important.

The 'community' includes local partners, city officials, and others who we might traditionally think of as the public. And remember that 'community' means 'client' too. Consider

all the different types of federal agencies in a GSA building, such as the Social Security Administration, or Immigration and Naturalization Service, that generate high numbers of visitors and depend on public access or visibility. Agencies like the National Park Service or Environmental Protection Agency have missions that may be educational or of special local interest, and a building's public spaces present opportunities to get those missions out to the public. Consider, too, any concern you've heard from a client agency about the quality of their workplace or its surroundings. All of these agencies are key members of the 'community'. In addition, stakeholders from the larger community may share many of these concerns and desires and, if asked, would be willing to bring valuable resources to the table to address these issues.

The sooner the community becomes involved in planning a public space the better. Projects are most successful when the community is encouraged to stay involved throughout the process and eventually become stewards of the place as it changes over time.

## 2. YOU ARE CREATING A PLACE—NOT JUST A DESIGN

In order for a federal project to create a valuable civic place, the entire undertaking must be approached more comprehensively than simply creating a design. When people describe a place they enjoy, they use words like "safe," "fun," "charming," and "welcoming." These words describe the intangible qualities of a true place – the kind of place people talk about and return to over and over again. GSA knows bricks and mortar projects as well as anyone, but it takes more than just the bricks and mortar to make the place. While design is crucial, design alone cannot create a place that is inviting and active. A truly successful project incorporates effective ongoing management and requires the involvement of many different disciplines and stakeholders.

### 3. YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE

Improving a public space and its surrounding neighborhood requires more resources and expertise than any one individual or organization can provide. Never underestimate the value of a broad range of partners. Partners can contribute innovative ideas, financial support or in-kind goods and services that contribute to GSA's properties as well as the neighborhood. They can help by collaborating on activities such as joint marketing, fundraising, and security that are difficult to organize at the scale of a single public space. Partners can also broaden the impact of a public space by coordinating on improvement projects or programming schedules.

In fact, the right partners can help GSA maximize the potential of its public spaces even where budgets and human resources are constrained. GSA's public spaces can be very valuable venues to support an organization's mission. In many cases, they can "bring" their program to GSA's space and create the activity without requiring resources from GSA, since the value of the public space makes it worth the partners' effort. It pays to involve a broad range of partners—and to appreciate how GSA's public spaces can offer attractive venues for them.

### 4. THEY ALWAYS SAY, "IT CAN'T BE DONE." BUT IT DOESN'T ALWAYS TURN OUT THAT WAY.

Because government is compartmentalized and fragmented, public officials often have a limited ability to deal with public spaces effectively themselves. In municipal governments, for instance, there are myriad agencies that affect public space, but unfortunately, few cities have a single department or person responsible for developing and managing public places. Also, these agencies often have larger mandates that make the creation of effective public spaces a secondary consideration. Therefore, when an idea stretches the established habits of an agency, and an official says, "It can't be done,"

## 11 Principles

FOR TURNING FEDERAL SPACES INTO GREAT CIVIC PLACES

- 1 The community is the expert.
- 2 You are creating a place, not a design.
- 3 You can't do it alone.
- 4 They always say it can't be done.
- 5 You can see a lot just by observing.
- 6 Develop a vision.
- 7 Form supports function.
- 8 Triangulate.
- 9 Start with the petunias.
- 10 Money is not the issue.
- 11 You are never finished.

what that usually means is: "We've never done things that way before."

This is especially challenging for GSA property managers, given the very real fiscal constraints and security concerns under which they operate, the preferences of tenant agencies, and the often pressing issues that compete for their limited time. However, changing one's perspective as to what is possible is the key to success. In fact, when you reach the point when people start to say it can't be done, that usually means you are well on your way to getting the most out of the project. Bringing clients and partners into the process early on, and in a meaningful way, will enable you to overcome obstacles together and exceed expectations.

### 5. YOU CAN SEE A LOT JUST BY OBSERVING.

It is important for property managers to gain an intimate understanding of how their civic place functions on a day to day basis. Regularly observing the way people use your facility's public spaces as you go on your rounds can yield tremendous insight into what people want from the space and what improvements are



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*When you reach the point when people start to say it can't be done, that usually means you are well on your way to getting the most out of the project.*

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needed. People will often go to extraordinary lengths to use a less-than-optimal space in the manner that suits them best. For example, if you observe people using waste receptacles as places to sit (which happens more often than you would think), then that is a strong signal that better seating is needed.

By routinely observing the use of a public space, you will also be better prepared to guide potential partners through the Place Audit to evaluate the facility. GSA has found that observing places together with clients and other stakeholders goes a long way toward developing the relationships that are needed to make great projects. Often, stakeholders have not had an opportunity to discuss their mutual interests and concerns. Bringing them together to observe a place is a highly effective way to further mutual understanding and trade insights and thoughts as to who can contribute the energy and resources needed for improvements.

## 6. DEVELOP A VISION.

Every federal facility has its own community whose ideas can evolve into a vision for the place. What is a “vision”? Put simply, it is an outline of what people would like to see a place used for—what activities should happen there and what amenities should be present. The vision should be defined primarily by those who will use the place, rather than the professionals or public agencies who are responsible for planning it and maintaining it. Creating a long-term vision for programming and securing a facility’s public spaces, as well as future site development, will enable you to undertake the more easily achievable short-term changes in ways that support long term goals.

Property managers can start bringing forth these ideas by asking tenants to think about other places they have enjoyed, the activities that occur in those places, and the physical elements that support those activities. GSA project

architects and staff from the Art in Architecture, Historic Preservation, Urban Development, and First Impressions programs can be brought in to share successful examples from elsewhere to stimulate and excite people as well as demonstrate what works and why. This will help people develop a vision for the place you are trying to improve.

A comprehensive long-term vision extends beyond the property line. Consider how the area around your facility may change over time, and what local entities are likely to effect that change. By including these partners in the process of developing a vision, GSA can influence the future of the surrounding area for the better.

## 7. FORM SUPPORTS FUNCTION.

As discussed in Principle 2, design alone cannot create a successful place, but it remains a critical ingredient. The important thing to keep in mind is that most great public spaces are designed based on an understanding of how people will use the space. Conversely, when public spaces fail it is often simply because function was never seriously considered at the outset of the design process. Completing the Place Audit in Section 2 will help determine what functions are desirable in your facility. The sample solutions in Section 3 will also help you understand what design improvements will make the space attractive, usable and comfortable for people—in other words, how you can use form to support function.

Implementing some solutions may require the help of a designer or architect. In that case, the preceding steps in this guide are especially crucial for a GSA project team to follow, in order to help their architects understand the program of desired uses, which should inform the design from the outset and make it more effective once completed.

*Developing the ability to engage local partners is more critical to success than a large financial investment or capital project.*

## 8. TRIANGULATE.

“Triangulation” refers to the fact that places with multiple uses are more active, enjoyable, flexible, and stable than locations that have just one use. On the micro scale, it means locating elements in such a way that they play off each other, creating a synergy of activity. For example, a bench, a trash receptacle and a vending cart placed near each other “triangulate” because together, they create a livelier zone of activity than if they were isolated from each other. On a larger scale, triangulation means creating districts with good pedestrian connections and active ground floor uses, giving people several destinations within walking distance of each other.

For GSA buildings, where the mix of activities within a building is mostly pre-determined, triangulation often means being thoughtful about where an agency or activity is placed within the building. The placement of high traffic agencies can be used to activate public spaces, and this typically serves their business interests as well. Placing cafeterias, credit unions, recruiting offices, post offices, or the like on the ground floor with direct physical or visual connections to the outside can improve access and circulation, as well as enhance the image of the facility. Additionally, the ability of these agencies to generate high levels of foot traffic is a key component in attracting partner organizations to program the public spaces of the facility. When the ground floor of a facility is perceived as active, then, for example, a theatre group or farmers market will have a greater interest in using that location. This is the process by which uses at a GSA facility can accumulate and triangulate with each other.

## 9. START WITH THE PETUNIAS.

To create a good public space requires more than long-term planning and large-scale changes. Many great plans get bogged down because they are too complex, cost too much, or take too long to happen. Starting with quick

and inexpensive changes, however, can generate the necessary momentum, commitment and buy-in to make longer-term changes a reality. By showing results fast, like planting a bed of petunias in a formerly colorless plaza, a property manager generates broad additional support for other placemaking efforts. Short-term actions are also a great way to test out ideas and give people confidence that change is occurring and their input matters.

In many of the most successful public spaces, short-term actions occurred at the outset and were evaluated while longer-term planning was in progress. One example is a downtown park that was scheduled for a complete capital restoration. A preliminary step in this expensive, long-term campaign was to set up a book market to draw positive activity. The experiment gave confidence to the organization managing the park’s restoration and demonstrated that such uses would draw people. When the park was fully restored several years later, similar types of uses were included in the final plan. Likewise, short-term changes can be made to the interior of a federal building as precursors to a major repair and alteration project. Replacing outdated signs, rearranging lobby furniture to create conversational seating areas, and adding interior lighting can all be done quickly.

Good public spaces don’t happen overnight, and people don’t have all the answers at the outset. The key is to provide for flexibility – to grow the space by experimenting, evaluating and incorporating the lessons learned into the next steps. It is up to the property manager to “nurture the space” as it grows.

## 10. MONEY IS NOT THE ISSUE.

Since GSA’s primary resources must be directed first toward meeting client needs, funds for pure public space improvements are often scarce. But the lack of money should not be an excuse to do nothing. In fact, too much money often discourages the inventiveness, creativity and

persistence required to create a great place, because the pressure to spend it can result in projects that overlook the smaller types of improvements that can have very strong impact. As demonstrated in Principle 9, the way to start achieving GSA's Public Space Goals is through small-scale, inexpensive improvements that have a positive impact at low or no cost. Amenities such as vending carts, outdoor café tables and chairs, umbrellas, flowers, benches, or movable seating are all relatively inexpensive and can get the ball rolling in creating a well-used public space.

It is also important to remember the value of the public space itself to potential partners. In GSA facilities located in Syracuse and Chicago, the location, level of activity, and visibility of the public spaces—combined with the staff's willingness to work closely with local partners—elicited significant resources from outside GSA to activate and manage these places (See the Case Studies later in this Section). In the long run, developing the ability to engage local partners in effective management of a space is more critical to success than a large financial investment or capital project (See Principle 11: You are Never Finished).

Most importantly, when the lack of money is a problem, it indicates that the wrong concept is at work—not simply because the plans are too expensive, but because the project has not generated the broad-based buy-in that allows GSA to leverage the resources of others. If the community—meaning both client agencies and outside stakeholders—is a partner in the endeavor from the outset, their involvement will lead to a sense of ownership that will foster support and contributions, which will in turn make the place grow and thrive. In other words, when the community's vision drives a project, resources follow. The most successful public space projects tend to use an incremental approach in which the place grows little by little; accordingly, people become more and more invested as it grows. Such contributions are not necessarily monetary. They may come in the

form of donated goods and services or volunteer labor; the cost of any project is therefore reduced in proportion to the benefits received from these contributions.

## 11. YOU ARE NEVER FINISHED.

No matter how good the design of a space is, it will never become a true place unless it is well cared for. The reason is that good places are not static. The use of public spaces changes daily, weekly, and seasonally. Given the certainty of change and the fluid nature of the use of a place at different times, developing the ability to respond effectively is absolutely critical.

According to Project for Public Spaces, about eighty percent of any public space's success can be attributed to its ongoing management. A good management structure includes mechanisms to ensure effective communication with tenant agencies and clients and a reliable system for tracking and responding to requests. Applying this structure to public spaces means responding proactively to issues related to the maintenance and programming of a plaza or lobby, and maintaining communication with security personnel, adjacent stakeholders, and city staff in order to identify and resolve problems quickly. Good management, for example, means hosting a range of events, noticing changes in the use of the space and then acting on them, and having the ability to put out items such as movable furniture at a moment's notice.

There are several outstanding public space management models that GSA project managers can follow. The Management Models included in the next section provide an outline of the management structure of the James A. Hanley Courthouse and Federal Building in Syracuse, New York and the John C. Kluczynski Federal Plaza in Chicago, Illinois. Models such as these show the value of GSA-managed public spaces to outside groups and illustrate how these spaces can be activated without placing demands on GSA's limited resources.

# CASE STUDIES OF PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENTS

## LOW COST

### CHICAGO, ILLINOIS: PUBLIC SPACE PROGRAMMING TURNS FEDERAL BUILDING INTO A CITY-WIDE DESTINATION

Chicago’s John C. Kluczynski Federal Plaza is used regularly for community events, including a popular farmers market, making it a well-known destination that improves the image of the Kluczynski Federal Building. The farmers market operates every Thursday from May to October. In addition, the Plaza has hosted an annual Oktoberfest, a Job Corps exercise program, and the public schools’ “City Year” program for high school seniors, as well as various cultural events, fairs, political rallies and demonstrations. In the warm months the Plaza is used an average of three days per week. The activity in the Plaza helps build partnerships with neighboring institutions and businesses, and generally promotes a sense of community. Following implementation of the farmers market, the facility’s tenant satisfaction scores increased. These benefits were realized with very little cost to and effort from GSA.



The weekly farmers market at John C. Kluczynski Federal Plaza.

#### Reasons for Success

Because of the Plaza’s central location and visibility, it is in demand for use by outside parties. The farmers market, for instance, is operated in partnership with the City of Chicago.

Use of the Plaza includes an agreement with the event sponsor that GSA will not incur any extra cleaning or security costs. GSA provides no more security than it would if there were no events in the Plaza. Chicago bicycle police regularly patrol on the days the farmers market is active, and some large event sponsors, such as those for the eight-day Oktoberfest, provide additional security.

### NORFOLK, VIRGINIA: TEAMING UP WITH LOCAL BID TO ACCESS LOCAL RESOURCES



GSA’s management staff and the BID team in Norfolk, VA.

In 2004, GSA’s Mid-Atlantic Region signed a services contract with the Downtown Norfolk Council. Under the contract, the Council provides cleaning services to the area around three federal buildings in Norfolk’s newly revitalized Granby Street corridor. The Council has also played a leading role in downtown Norfolk’s overall improvement, effectively improving the working environment and surrounding neighborhood for the federal workers at GSA’s Norfolk facilities. The Council is one of thirty BIDs nationwide with which GSA contracts for services. Unlike private property owners that typically are assessed (or ‘taxed’) to cover the costs of enhanced district services (including sidewalk cleaning, security patrols, marketing, etc.), as a federal agency

# Management Models

**JOHN C. KLUCZYNSKI**  
**FEDERAL PLAZA**  
Chicago, IL

**Managed by:** Federal Plaza is owned and overseen by the GSA Property Management Office as a part of the federal complex in Chicago. The property manager's office uses GSA Form 3453, "Application for Use of Space in Public Buildings and Grounds," to review and approve use of the plaza by outside parties. Regular events make a blanket application for the season. Events and programs are managed by their sponsoring organizations.

**Maintenance:** Third parties cover all cleaning and security costs when they use the plaza, so there is no cost to GSA.

**Marketing and Promotions:** GSA does not generally advertise the availability of its public spaces; most organizations approach GSA on their own to inquire about using the spaces. Because of the plaza's central location and visibility, there are many requests for use.

**Challenges:** When the farmers market was first proposed for the plaza, the Federal Protective Services (FPS) was the only group to raise concern. The FPS and city conducted background checks on all proposed vendors, and the city continues to monitor the standard of food sold and enforce health codes.

**Funding:** Other than the BA-54 operating funds already allocated for this facility, which cover the administrative costs and occasional extra cleaning necessary after the events, there is no cost to GSA. GSA charges event promoters a \$25 fee to oversee form processing; the vendors are not charged any fees by GSA.

GSA may only contract for those services that it finds are necessary and beneficial to the federal agencies at the GSA buildings in these districts. In various locations, GSA has contracted for security patrols, streetscape maintenance, or a combination of these and other services.

## Reasons for Success

GSA's property manager has found that the BID contract provides services that improve the working environment for his client agencies at a price that is fair and reasonable to the government. Moreover, the contract discussions between the Council and GSA also led to enhanced coordination on broader downtown issues. As the Council's Executive Director, Cathy Coleman, noted, "Federal building security officers and our own security personnel are working together much better now, sharing information. As valuable as our contract with GSA is, this type of coordination is just as important for keeping the neighborhood a great place to do business."

## SYRACUSE, NY: THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND INTEGRATED SECURITY

The "Party in the Plaza" at the Hanley Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse is more than a twenty-year tradition; it's a linchpin of community life in Syracuse, New York. Every Wednesday in the summer, starting at about 5 p.m., the party fills up the plaza and bands perform music ranging from gospel to pop, country & western to R&B. Up to 5,000 people turn out to listen, dance, and enjoy all manner of festival food. "This makes or breaks businesses in downtown Syracuse, it's like another weekend night," says William A. Cooper, president of the UpDowntowners, the volunteer group that organizes the events. On top of that, proceeds are used to provide grants to local nonprofits. In recognition of the event's significance to

## Management Models

### JAMES A. HANLEY COURTHOUSE AND FEDERAL BUILDING

Syracuse, NY

**Managed by:** The GSA Property Management Center.

**Maintenance:** The GSA Property Management Office handles normal daily maintenance of the plaza. The Syracuse Updowntowners handle all of the sanitation arrangements, as well as clean the plaza every Wednesday after the event.

**Marketing & Promotion:** Currently the availability of the federal plaza is not promoted; most groups wishing to hold an event on the federal plaza approach GSA on their own.

**Challenges:** One of the early major challenges that GSA faced was to decide what role the federal government would take in the “Parties.” Initially, the GSA was providing minimal security, sanitation, and restroom accommodations inside the building. However, as attendance grew into the thousands, and security concerns heightened, these contributions became impractical. The GSA Field Office now provides a secure room for counting money, and limited access to and storage in the building. The Updowntowners now provide their own portable restrooms (delivered and removed the same day), cleaning, and most of the security. The Field Office also finds it helpful to work closely with the individuals producing the event to make sure that all promotions are consistent with government rules regarding what may take place on federal property.

**Funding:** No GSA funding is used.



The Party in the Plaza draws up to 5,000 people to the James A. Hanley Federal Building and Courthouse.

Syracuse, GSA received the Updowntowners’ “Award for Excellence”, given annually to the individual, business or organization that has contributed substantially to the downtown area.

#### Reasons for Success

A key reason these arrangements could be worked out effectively is the collaborative relationship between GSA, building tenants, and the UpDowntowners. As part of their planning every year, the Updowntowners put together a proposal about the organization, their licenses, their insurance, and get written approval from every judge in the building. Security for the event was tightened after September 11, 2001. Today security staff observe everybody who enters the site, which has four access points, but there are no metal detectors or searches. More than a dozen uniformed city police are on the scene, as well as FPS officers and contract security, with the UpDowntowners picking up the extra cost. City police and bomb-sniffing dogs inspect every vehicle that comes to the Plaza — including delivery trucks, trailers for food vendors, even the local radio station’s promotional van. Security risks were also reduced by moving portable toilets and dumpsters farther from the building, and by banning parking on streets surrounding the plaza during the event. Complaints about the new arrangements have been minimal.

## MEDIUM-COST

### MARTINSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA: IMPROVING ACCESS, CIRCULATION, IMAGE, AND SECURITY

Prior to the renovation of the lobby and entryway of the Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Martinsburg, West Virginia, the entry was too small for the building, forcing pedestrians to enter directly from the sidewalk with no approach area. Building identification signage was in poor repair, lighting was insufficient at night, and mail and paper boxes cluttered the street in front of the building. Within the lobby, security equipment compromised both entry and circulation while eliminating what little interior public space had existed. Green glazed wall tile and brown quarry tile flooring throughout the interior space projected an institutional image.

Once derelict, the space now receives full public use. Employees and visitors easily navigate sophisticated public spaces commensurate with the important nature of the building's functions. Visitors encounter displays that link the history of the judicial system with the current purpose of the building, further elevating their perception of the federal government. The project won



Before



After

both the 2003 Excellence in Government Award for Improved Federal Image, Federal Executive Board and the 2002 GSA Design Award Citation.

#### Reasons for Success

The simple addition of a vestibule outside the existing entrance has allowed for comfortable passage into the building, improving access and circulation. A mural inscribed with the Charters of Freedom welcomes visitors and directs them to the entrance. The image of the facility is further enhanced by glass and metal walls that harmonize with the building's International Style architecture, establishing a light-filled entry point along the street. Finishes and signage also create a new graphic identity sympathetic to the building's modern roots. Inside the ground floor lobby, the public space has been enlarged and now doubles as a gallery with floor-to-ceiling panels at the perimeter exhibiting the history of the local, state, and federal judicial system.

### MONTPELIER, VERMONT: DESIGNING A PLACE THAT WORKS FOR PEOPLE

For years, Montpelier's International Style Post Office, which occupies the ground floor of a federal building with a mix of federal tenants, was considered an eyesore that disrupted the visual continuity of Main Street and obstructed pedestrian movement between the state capitol and the downtown. Local residents thought the building was neither visually nor functionally integrated with the sidewalk or Main Street. GSA collaborated with the Montpelier Downtown Community Association (MDCA) to enhance the image of this building by creating a user-friendly public space in front of the Post Office.

GSA upgraded the paving in front of the building, relocated mail and news boxes, and reinstalled the benches in a better location. This improved pedestrian circulation and made the space more appealing for public use. The city, under its existing funding for downtown improvements,



The improved streetscape at the Montpelier Post Office creates better pedestrian connections to downtown.

widened the sidewalks, instituted short-term angled parking in front of the building (at the request of the Postal Supervisor), added landscaping, upgraded the lampposts, and put in new crosswalks on the street leading to the building in order to facilitate safe and direct pedestrian access—all as part of a scheduled water main replacement project. The improvements have also slowed traffic through the Main Street corridor, making it safer for cyclists, pedestrians, and customers of the Post Office and federal offices.

**Reasons for Success**

When GSA and community stakeholders worked through the Place Audit together, it became clear that the optimal solution was not MDCA’s original request to replace the building’s façade. Instead, the Audit findings indicated that people wanted the Post Office to function better as a social gathering place. Generating more public activity would then lessen the detrimental impact of the building’s facade on the pedestrian experience between the state capitol and the downtown retail area. While GSA, the Post Office, and the Montpelier community were discussing how to fund and implement the desired improvements, the city revealed plans to replace a Main Street water main. GSA and MDCA contacted the city about opportunities to coordinate this infrastructure project with the Post Office improvements; the cooperative effort led to the implementation of many elements in the community’s vision.

**SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA:  
PARTNERS COMBINE TO CREATE A  
DOWNTOWN GATHERING PLACE**

In February, 2005, GSA’s Rocky Mountain regional office convened a public workshop to discuss the design of public spaces around a planned building for the U.S. Attorneys Office in Sioux Falls. The new build-to-suit lease facility

is located next to a beautiful Richardsonian Romanesque federal courthouse built in 1895, just half a block from the busy Phillips Street restaurant district. The street between the two buildings was vacated for security setbacks, creating room for a new public plaza. Completed in the summer of 2006, the courthouse plaza was designed to create an attractive, active public space that supports city improvement plans, creates an outstanding workplace for the U.S. Attorneys, and bolsters long-term marketability for the developer.



A concept diagram of the new square at the U.S. Attorneys Office in Sioux Falls.

The finished plaza incorporates a range of amenities to promote public use, including a water feature using locally-quarried South Dakota Granite, a small amphitheater for public speeches and performances, a small food kiosk for lunch and snacks, an outdoor café and seating areas, an area for games, attractive seasonal displays of flowers, and locations for temporary sculpture. It is regularly the site of programmed activities, from horse-and-carriage rides to “Hot Summer Nights,” a recurring event that features music and food vendors. Access and circulation have also been improved—both within the public space itself and between the GSA facilities and the neighboring downtown—with better informational signage and maps of other downtown destinations. Future goals involve making the GSA property an effective link between nearby residential areas and the commercial district downtown by improving the walking environment around the plaza.



Ideas include adding trees, plantings, murals, pedestrian scale lighting, and better crosswalks.

### Reasons for Success

At the initial workshop, participants based their ideas on how best to support public use of the square. The U.S. Attorneys Office, federal District and Bankruptcy courts, U.S. Marshals Service, GSA, city planners, Main Street Sioux Falls, local arts organizations, private developer Stencil Development, project manager The Winkels Group and project designer Koch Hazard Baltzer Architects all participated in the workshop, which was facilitated by Good Neighbor consultant Project for Public Spaces. “The workshop helped all of us to think in new ways and at new levels. Public space is more than a landscape. It is about people and connection, sustainability and pride. The experience transformed how we will approach our work in the future,” says GSA project manager Janice Dinkel.

Following the workshop, the collaborators formed a working group that successfully saw the project through the phases of planning, implementation, and ongoing management. “The working group is like an impromptu board of directors for plaza management,” says Dan Statema of Main Street Sioux Falls, a coalition of downtown businesses that oversees programming and maintenance. “The plaza created new opportunities for cooperation between businesses, GSA, and federal agencies, and it will continue to do so.”

## HIGH-COST

### DENVER’S FEDERAL DISTRICT: THE VALUE OF INCREMENTAL PLACEMAKING

Denver’s Federal District occupies four square blocks near the heart of downtown, including the Byron Rogers U.S. Courthouse and Federal Building—a modern complex with 1,200

employees—and a new courthouse annex completed in 2002. To coincide with the addition of the \$75 million courthouse, GSA initiated a multi-phased repair and alteration project of the District’s public spaces, planned by Project for Public Spaces, First Impressions IDIQ consultant Gensler, and Civitas, a landscape architecture firm. The project included a \$1.6 million reconstruction of the Byron Rogers plaza, funded as a GSA First Impressions project.

At the time, the plaza was little more than “an expanse of sprawling concrete with not much going on,” according to GSA’s Al Camp. During the McVeigh trial, the facility bunkered down, adding perimeter security barriers and banning parking from adjacent streets. The office tower entrance was also dysfunctional, obscured in a corner of the plaza and too small to accommodate a modern security checkpoint, resulting in long queues. Some tenants were so unhappy they asked to leave.

GSA began looking at ways to renovate the plaza and soon realized that success hinged upon developing a plan for whole area. Changes evolved over time, beginning with simple design and maintenance steps that improved usability and appearance, such as adding benches near sidewalks and planting flowers at street corners, near building entrances and atop concrete security barriers. An “ambassador” began greeting visitors at a podium, dispensing directions and other assistance. The space was also programmed with special events, such as a festival celebrating cultural diversity and a giant cookout. These small-scale public space improvements were financed through GSA operating funds. They not only signaled that longer term changes were planned, they also resulted in increased use of the plaza and immediate positive feedback from employees and the public.

The longer term improvements were implemented gradually over a span of four years.

Today, well-designed permanent security barriers around the plaza have replaced the clunky temporary barriers, while new benches and seating added to grassy areas create a welcoming space for employees wishing to sit or eat lunch outside. A new entrance pavilion yields a more efficient security process while respecting the historic character of the building. New features at the rear of the courthouse improve the blank facade on that side: landscaping makes a reinforced wall seem less like a security feature, and an Art in Architecture commission by artist Jim Campbell enlivens the building with a kinetic light show that represents scenes of the American West.

Throughout the design process, plaza and annex improvements were tied into broader goals for the area. Representatives from federal tenants, city agencies, cultural groups and civic groups, as well as surrounding property owners, took part in the process. Partner contributions included: a day-care center mural painted by a local youth service organization; new trees along the rail line that passes through the area, courtesy of the Denver Regional Transportation District; and art for the courthouse interior on loan from a local foundation. In addition, the city played a role in infrastructure improvements. For example, the annex project involved the construction of a tunnel to the Rogers Courthouse under the street, which meant the street and sidewalks had to be reconstructed. To fully leverage this construction, the plan called for working with the city to narrow the street and improve the pedestrian environment.

The renovated plaza and new courthouse annex now provide a friendlier place for federal workers and people visiting these federal facilities, and have acted as a catalyst for public and private investment.

Before



After



After



After

**Reasons for Success**

The improvements to the Denver Federal District gained credibility and support from tenants and other stakeholders for two main reasons. First, although the scope of the project called for major capital investment, changes began at a small scale, using operating funds. The quick improvements built momentum for what came later. “This shows there is a lot a building manager can do on their own,” says Tim Horne, manager of the properties in the Federal District.

Second, community partners were sought from the outset, and their participation in both infrastructure projects and event programming turned out to be invaluable. “It’s extraordinary to see a local face on a federal agency, to see this process engage the local community so intimately and think about these issues at such a fine grain,” notes Denver City Councilmember Susan Barnes-Gelt. The successful changes at the Federal District are thus an outgrowth of GSA’s commitment to make its buildings not only better places for workers and visitors, but also better neighbors in the communities where they are located.

**3RD AND C STREETS IN SOUTHWEST DC: BUILDING A GATEWAY TO THE NATIONAL MALL**

GSA’s National Capital Region is in the midst of a public space visioning and planning process that will turn a confusing, barren area near the National Mall into a lively public amenity

while improving site security around four federal buildings. The project was prompted by the planned modernization of four adjacent federal buildings: Cohen, Switzer, Humphrey, and a former FDA research laboratory that will be converted to a federal office building. The buildings comprise the intersection of 3rd and C Streets in Southwest Washington, DC, just north of a busy Metro stop.

As the daily workplace of thousands of federal workers and a primary gateway between the Metro and the landmarks that millions visit each year—including the U.S. Botanical Garden, U.S. Capitol, National Museum of the American Indian and the future American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial and Eisenhower Memorial—the intersection provides a prime opportunity to create a vital public amenity. Currently, however, the Humphrey Plaza is a very large open space that sees very little activity, C Street is dominated by car traffic, and three large parking lots create too many dead zones near the facilities.

Rios Clementi Hale Studios, a Los Angeles landscape architecture firm, is completing the plan for the area after thoroughly consulting a wide-ranging assortment of stakeholders, and their suggestions will be incorporated as each of the four buildings is modernized—a creative way to realize a large-scale vision one step at a time. The public space elements will be funded as the site improvement components in the budget of each individual project.

Improvements aim to turn the sterile areas into places that accommodate activity and create links to the nearby National Mall. The plan will create new public open space, with the Art in Architecture commissions for the first two projects combined to create one or two large commissions in these new spaces. A “hot corner” will take shape at the corner of the Humphrey Plaza, featuring seating and an outdoor dining area to create a focal point of activity. Better wayfinding signage on the sidewalks will strengthen the connection between the Metro entrance and the Mall. The pedestrian

experience will also improve with the addition of unobtrusive perimeter security measures that double as amenities, such as benches that also serve as security barriers.

### **Expectations for Success**

The project is the result of clever forethought in the regional office, which led to the coordination of improvements to the four buildings. At the same time, the site-by-site approach ensures that the whole project won't get bogged down by its own weight. GSA's project executive for these four buildings, John Crowley, is a champion of the coordinated plan, and will hold design architects of each project to the plan's vision for the public spaces.

The plan itself is a model of GSA's Public Space Action Points. The Humphrey Plaza's new amenities will make it much more attractive for public use. The perimeter security measures are well-integrated into the sidewalk experience. Pedestrian circulation will benefit from the improved wayfinding. Replacing the dead zones with landscaped areas will drastically improve the image and aesthetics of the area. Neighboring institutions, including the museums on the Mall and the National Botanic Garden, will play an important role in ensuring the future success of the project, especially in their capacity to program the promising new public spaces.

