

OPEN STREETS TOOLKIT

Tips and tricks to help you navigate the
Department Of Transportation (DOT) Open
Streets Program



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For spending time with me during this process, and giving me insight into public space management in New York City

THE BEGINNING

How to prepare for the Open Streets
Application



Crafting a successful and sustainable Open Streets program requires time. It's important to start planning early, giving yourself the time to strategize and create the energy to help you push your Open Street into the future.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is essential for not only garnering support but also completing your application. You can tackle this step in stages: focusing on getting the word out, garnering support, then getting the necessary signatures.

Getting the word out:

This is the stage where you should start reaching out to your neighbors, local small business owners, etc. to have a conversation about public space in your neighborhood, and your ideas about starting your own Open Streets program. These initial conversations will serve as the early-planning phase. They should help you to conceptualize what the overall goals for your street is, and will also help you identify a support base for your program in the future. In order to help you conceptualize your Open Street, I would suggest visiting other programs that fit the size of your own. They can act like a template for you, serving ideas for activities and design elements that you can emulate on your own street. During this stage, you can begin to attend the Community Board meetings, as a way to spread your ideas to more people and learn more about the perception your neighbors have of the street and the Open Streets Program overall. While at the Community Board meetings, or any public forum, be prepared for people to argue over issues like the loss of parking spots and the inconvenience of a street closure. These meetings can also be utilized as brainstorming sessions, where you may develop more ideas for programming or design. The insights gained at these meetings will help you develop your engagement strategy in the gathering support phase.

Community Engagement

Gathering Support:

Now that you have developed a basic plan, this is where the intensive engagement occurs. I recommend creating a physical print-out with a display of the street, the reasons for closing it off, and a brief proposal for what kind of programming you'd plan for the neighborhood. Along with your print-out, I'd also suggest developing a short elevator speech detailing why the Open Streets would be an important asset to the neighborhood. You may also decide to translate the printout into an online forum (such as an Instagram or Facebook page). The engagement during this stage can be knocking on doors, pasting flyers, talking to business owners, or tabling at local events. It is important that you consistently go to the Community Board meetings with your final proposal, as you will need a signed letter of support from the Board to complete your Open Streets Application.

Getting your signatures:

Once you have garnered support, you can reach out to members of the community for a formal letter of support. Utilize the relationships that you've built throughout the previous engagement stages to help make this process easier for you. You will need two letters from a resident in the area (including small business owners if the street happens to be on a commercial corridor) and one from the Community Board. Receiving letters may take a while, so give yourself time to complete this requirement.

Application Tips and Tricks

There are five main items that you will need to complete your application: three letters of recommendation (2 from community members, and 1 letter from the Community Board), a preliminary site plan, an operations and maintenance plan, and a preliminary budget. This is where going to other Open Streets during your initial community engagement can come into play.

Site Plan:

The site plan is a sketch of how you'd like to organize your space. Where will you put chairs and tables? Will there be space for children to play? If so, where? The site plan does not have to be a work of art, but should demonstrate that you've thought about how this space can fit the needs of the community. Your site plan will be different depending on the kind of street-closure you're applying for. There are three different variations of Open Streets (School Streets, Limited-Local Access, and Full Closure)* and each have their own street closure regulations.

- **School Streets:** does not allow for any vehicle traffic besides emergency vehicles. There must be fifteen feet of clear space left in the street to allow for emergency vehicle access.
- **Limited Local Access:** allows for limited vehicle traffic while the Open Streets is not operating. The speed limit is set to 5mph and vehicles are only allowed on the street to park, pick-up or drop-off, for local deliveries, if they're emergency vehicles, Access-A-Ride, Utility vehicles, or are other necessary city vehicles (such as Con- Ed or garbage trucks).
- **Full Closure:** does not allow for any vehicle traffic besides emergency vehicles. There must be fifteen feet of clear space left in the street to allow for emergency vehicle access.

*source: DOT [Open Streets website](#)

Application Tips and Tricks

Operation and Management Plan:

The operations plan and maintenance plan should connect with your proposed site plan. The operations plan details how you will maintain the space on a day-to-day basis. Who will handle the set-up and breakdown of all the design elements (including the police barriers set up at the entrance and exit of the street), daily and event clean-up, etc? Who will be the contact for vendors hired to organize programming on the street? I would imagine what a typical weekly schedule would look like for your program, and create a plan accordingly.

Budget Proposal:

The budget proposal can be incredibly simple, and I recommend using the budget sheet located on the [application](#). It asks for you to give a general detail of how much your daily operations will cost, but does not include the cost of programming or big events. While you do not have to have a fully flushed-out budget for your application, it's important to think about how much the Open Streets will cost you. DOT does have a [programming catalog](#) available that can help you understand how much certain events and activities cost. Open Streets can be expensive to maintain, and being aware of that now will help you sustain the program in the future.

***The One NYC Plaza Equity Program is available to partners who demonstrate financial need and have Open Space programs in an areas with little to no access to public space. The program provides operational assistance at little to no cost to eligible partners. Click [here](#) for more information about the One NYC Plaza Equity Program. Please note that while the website states this program is for plaza partners, it was extended to include [Open Streets partners in May 2023](#) ***

Fundraising

DOT provides up-to \$20,000 of programmatic and maintenance funding for partners throughout the year. It's important to note that while DOT has funding to help with the operations, that money is dispensed using a reimbursement system. You will initially have to pay for all costs regarding the Open Streets up-front, and reimbursements can sometimes take two months or more. Finding creative ways to fundraise: such as a GoFundMe campaign, an auction, or selling branded merchandise can help you gather the funds needed to support your Open Streets throughout the year. Below is a brief list of outside funding sources that may be available to you as well.

Citizens NYC Community Grant:

- Dispenses micro-grants of up to \$3000 for community organizations who address critical needs within their neighborhoods.
- Website:<https://www.citizensnyc.org/grantmaking>

TD Bank Community Funding Grants:

- Provides charitable donations to community organizations providing necessary services, innovative events, or programming focused on sustainability, diversity, and inclusion.
- Website:<https://www.td.com/us/en/about-us/communities/ready-commitment/funding-opportunities>

SBS Open Streets Grants:

- Provides grants which support the operation and maintenance of Open Streets Programs located in commercial corridors.
- Website:<https://www.nyc.gov/site/sbs/neighborhoods/open-streets-grant.page>

Street Plans created a great toolkit that explains funding and offers resources on how to create a "sponsorship package" for your Open Street program. To learn more, click [here](#)

*In order to obtain state and federal funding, you must be a registered non-profit organization with an active tax ID *

THE APPROVAL STAGE

How to prepare yourself for the operation and
maintenance of your street



Once you've submitted your application, you will enter into the waiting period. It can take up to 90 days to hear back from DOT on the status of your application. This is when you should continue fundraising and crafting your programming schedule for the year. You should also be creating a volunteer base, building a coalition of neighbors who will help you run the Open Streets program.

Programming

This waiting period is a good time for you to start creating a programmatic schedule. What kind of events will you have in your space? How will you activate your Open Streets throughout your season? During your early community engagement, you should've crafted a vision for who the target audience of your programs is, and what outcomes you'd like to see in the neighborhood. These goals should be used to guide your programming. If you have no experience planning events, there are many resources available to you. You should first reach out to other organizations in your neighborhood to see if they'd like to use your street as a space for their events. Building connections is an important part of building a sustainable program, as well as connecting the local residents to the Open Street as well. Outside of your community partners, there are many organizations throughout New York City that can help with programming. Below is a list of some of these organizations, with a link to their website.

Hive Public Space

An organization that incorporates design and community engagement to produce community-driven design elements in public spaces.

Website: <https://www.hivepublicspace.com/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/hivepublicspace/>

Programming

Street Lab

An organization that provides pop-up programming throughout the city geared towards a variety of audiences and community needs.

Website: <https://www.streetlab.org/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/streetlab>

New York Public Library Bookmobile

A mobile library that travels Staten Island, Manhattan, and the Bronx to bring library materials and services directly to patrons.

Website: <https://www.nypl.org/bookmobile>

Twitter (X): <https://twitter.com/nyplbookmobile>

Grow NYC Greenmarkets

An organization that organizes farmer's markets and fresh food pick-ups throughout the city.

Website: <https://www.grownyc.org/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/grownyc/>

Design Trust for Public Space

An organization that utilizes community engagement to produce intriguing designs that fit the context of the spaces they're in.

Website: <https://www.designtrust.org/about/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/DesigntrustNYC/>

DOT Programming Catalogue

A list of DOT-approved programming partners that are available to those within the Open Space programs.

Website: chrome-

extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/ps-programming-catalogue.pdf>

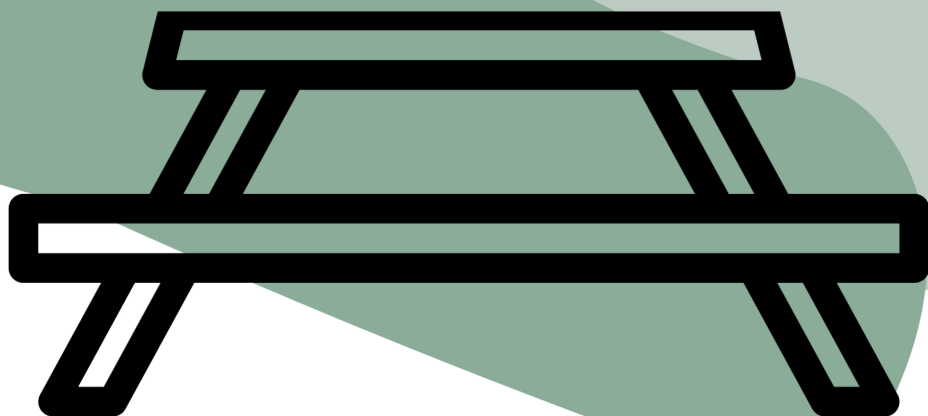
Operations

As previously stated, running an Open Streets program requires a lot of time and effort. The kind of street closure you have, the size of the street, and the kind of programming you plan will all guide your operations. It's important that you have a group of volunteers who will help you maintain your street. These individuals will be the face of the program for your neighbors and the people who visit. This may mean that they will be the ones handling any negative feedback or conversations surrounding the Open Streets program. Outside of your volunteer base, the Horticultural Society may also be an operational resource. Many partners, either through DOT or through their own contracting, utilize the HORT as a way to supplement their daily operations. The Association of Community Engagement or ACE Program, is another organization that can help with the daily maintenance duties. They provide clean-up and sanitation services for public space partners in the city, while also providing meaningful employment for those previously incarcerated or unhoused. To find out more about their services, click [here](#).

***Along with the Funding toolkit, Street Plans also created a comprehensive plan on how to create a volunteer base for your Open Street. To learn more, click [here](#).**

DAY-TO-DAY

What goes into the operations and management
of your Open Street



Now that you've been approved it's time to make your dreams a reality. All of your planning and relationship building done throughout the last two stages will culminate in the day to day operations of your new Open Street! There are many aspects of the operations and maintenance that you should be aware of to make your program run as smooth and efficient as possible.

Permits

In order to run your events and have activities on the street, you have to make sure that the appropriate permit is filed and approved with the city. The event you have planned will determine what kind of permit is required for your event. Your organization must have a liability insurance policy of at least \$1 Million to qualify for a permit of any kind. Depending on the event, additional insurance may be required. In order to file any permit, you must be a registered non-profit organization as well. Below is a list of permits you may need, and the agency that you will have to file with.

General event permit:

For any and all Open Streets or Plaza events, a permit will have to be filled with Street Activity Permitting Office (SAPO). Each permit filed costs \$25 and must be filled between 14 and 60 days before the date of the event. Permitting deadline information can be found [here](#).

NOTE: If your event requires another permit, such as a sound or building permit, those must be filed and approved before a SAPO permit can be granted.

Sound and No Parking Signs permits:

If your event contains music, will need special signage to detail where people can or can not park, or if you would like a full street closure (and are not a full-closure program) you must file a permit with the NYPD. Street closure permits can be submitted online, while sound permits are submitted in-person at your local police precinct. It costs \$45 each time you file, and must be filed five days before the date of your event. More information can be found [here](#).

Permits

Food vendor permits:

If you would like to have food at any of your events, you must obtain a food vendor permit from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. If you have hired a vendor to sell food at an event that does not already have an approved permit, the vendor must get a secondary food establishment permit to provide food on the street. The temporary food establishment permit costs \$75 to file, while the vendor food establishment permit costs \$280 to file. To find out more information, click [here](#).

Non-food vendor permits:

If your event will sell goods that are not food, you have to obtain a street fair vending permit from the Department of Consumer Affairs. The permit lasts for 30 days and costs \$10 to file. Many vendors will have an active permit, which you can submit without having to file one yourself. To find out more information, click [here](#).

Concessions permits:

In order to sell any goods or items at an event, you must file a concessions permit with the Department of Transportation. These permits only allow for concessions to be sold for 29 days of the year, which do not have to be planned consecutively. If concessions are sold at an event, none of the money may go directly to the Open Streets partner. These permits are free to file. To find out more information, click [here](#).

Temporary structure permits:

If you would like a tent, stage, or other non-permanent structure on your street you will have to file for a temporary structure permit with the Department of Buildings (DOB). If that structure will be used to congregate under, you must also file for a temporary place of assembly permit with DOB as well. The temporary place of assembly permit costs \$250 and must be filed at least ten days before the date of the event, while the temporary structure permit costs \$100 and must be filled at least 15 days prior to the event. For more information, click [here](#).

Permits

Generator permits:

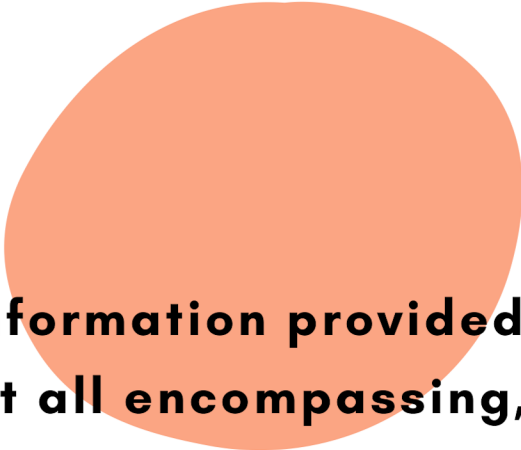
If your event requires a generator, or deals with an open flame, fireworks, fuel, or explosives, you have to file a permit with your local Fire Department precinct. The cost of the permit is dependent upon the volume of fuel, or the length of time the pyrotechnics or flame will be used. For more information, click [here](#).

Charitable donations solicitation permits:

In order to solicit donations at an event, you have to file with the Human Resource Administration (HRA). The permit can be filed at an HRA office, and must be filed at least ten days before the date of the event. To find out more information, click [here](#).

Continued community engagement

Community engagement is a way to get feedback on your Open Street, and develop better relationships between your program and the neighborhood. During each event, you should be asking for feedback from attendees on how they enjoyed the event, and areas they believe you could improve upon. Community engagement is also bettering your relationship with other local organizations, and developing more partnered events. The positive feedback can be used to prove the efficacy of your Open Streets program, which you can use to continue fundraising as your program continues. Better partnerships help alleviate the financial strain that your organization takes on. Community engagement can be difficult to organize during this stage, but Small Business Services (SBS) in partnership with Public Agenda offers community engagement training for organizations hoping to improve their engagement. To learn more about the program, check out SBS's website [here](#).



While the information provided in this report is not all encompassing, it does provide a general overview of the Open Streets program and its components. The many Open Streets programs present throughout the city provide necessary open space to the residents of New York City, and have become a key feature of everyday life for millions of people. I hope this report provides insight into the program, and helps answer some of the questions prospective partners might have about Open Streets.

**Sincerely,
Noah Miller**



The background features several large, organic, rounded shapes in shades of yellow, orange, and brown. Thin, wavy lines in a light pink or purple hue are scattered across the white background, some overlapping the colored shapes.

*Dreaming of
Public Space*

**A LETTER TO
DOT**

Publicness is a key feature of living in an urban area. It's completing your daily activities surrounded by strangers, crying on the G-train and not feeling watched or judged. It's standing on a roof and seeing New York City's iconic skyline laid out before you, sparkling in all her glory. Publicness is a way of being: it's a form of self-expression, a form of social construction, a mode of thinking and a calling card for life in the Big Apple. In New York City, the direct displays of publicness feel unique to the landscape and are a language that has been translated into its physical fabric. The business of it all, the scampering of bodies across the pavement is something that many people, residents and visitors, have fallen in love with. I have always felt that there is something magical about being constantly surrounded, and comforting in seeing the fact that no matter where you go, you are not alone.

The public nature of the city is something that, I believe, was taken for granted until the pandemic made it impossible for New Yorkers to experience it. Everyone was trapped inside, and the streets rang empty and hollow. It took us losing public space to understand its importance. These spaces allow us to build community: share in triumph and disappointment, challenge one's beliefs, and exercise our rights as both a citizen and human beings. As we finally leave the last dredges of the pandemic behind, the future of public space in the city is up for debate. Many of the features that we became accustomed to (such as the Open Streets and Open Restaurants program) are being renegotiated as the needs of the city change. As discussions continue, it's important to dream of what the possibilities could be. In a utopian situation, what would public space in New York City look like?

Within my public space dream world, the future of the current Open Space programs is one that is permanent and a stepping stone for greater public space in the city. These spaces would be shared equally across the boroughs, would be easier to access, and would be more than just a playground on a slab of concrete. I see the current semi-permanent programs—ones that offer partial closures, or only full closures on certain days of the week—turned into plazas that produce widespread green spaces. The need for green space is the same as the need for public space, but little has been done to produce spaces that fit within both contexts. I look at initiatives like the [Clean Air Green Corridor in Washington Heights](#) as an inspiration for how we should develop both public and green space. New York City, much like the rest of the world, is experiencing the effects of climate change. The impacts of our dependence on cars, fossil fuels, and unsustainable building practices, is literally leading our island into the sea. Public spaces should be utilized as more than just areas for congregation. They should be multi-purpose spaces where people can be educated, get access to medical care, and combat climate change on a mass scale. The dream world sees these rather disjointed Open Streets and plazas as opportunities for these goals to be met, all by creating a connected greenway aptly called the Green Belt.

The current model for the Open Streets program would be utilized as a beginning step towards building the Green Belt. The Open Streets would give partners time to assess the needs of the community, develop a schedule for programming, and craft a vision for the final design of the soon-to-be plaza. All of the Open Streets would be turned into permanent plazas, producing connected pedestrian pathways throughout all five boroughs. People could trek throughout the city without having to cross a busy roadway, all while experiencing the unique sights and sounds that each neighborhood has to offer. The artistic expression of the neighborhood would be a practice in place keeping, helping to further connect the residents to their plaza and to the neighborhood itself. Public art would be more than just a mural on a wall or a walkway, instead becoming a transformative programming and activist practice that would allow the neighborhood to actively demonstrate to the world who they are and what they represent.

In my dream world there is a sharing of responsibility and of care, creating a positive feedback loop between partners and city agencies. In reality, the split of responsibility is not equal as partners take almost full ownership (both financially and operationally) over their public spaces. In my utopian New York City, these responsibilities would be shared equally between partners and city agencies. The Green Belt's administrative organization would mimic that of a Parent Teacher Organization. City agencies would act as the "school", carrying all of the duties for permitting, financing, and maintaining the space. The partners in turn would be the "parents", helping to organize programming and acting as volunteers when needed. Communities would not be required to fund their spaces, or handle the tedious and time consuming administrative processes that come along with it. This would make it easier for communities with limited time and capital to develop their own Open Streets, creating more access to public space throughout the city, especially in areas that need it the most.

Besides being an active place for community building, the Green Belt would also give residents access to necessary green spaces. The connected plazas would be lush and mimic a forest: being full of native trees and plants, aiding to reduce the city's carbon footprint while also reversing the heat island effect. The reduction of impermeable sources would also help to replenish the underground water sources covered by the miles of concrete and steel used to develop the city. The Green Belt would represent a city-wide commitment to fighting environmental racism, creating pathways for better air and sound quality, while also promoting a closed-loop food system through the creation of more community gardens, and offering a safe area for education and mentorship. Having access to amenities like green spaces, educational enrichment, etc. makes the overall living experience better and more positive. The proximity of the Green Belt to communities in need would build stronger connections between said communities and the different mutual aid groups and social programs that we have in the city. Ultimately making it easier for residents to access necessary resources without having to leave their immediate neighborhoods. Bringing amenities within a hyper-local context connects more people to the things they need, helping to form self-supported communities.

My dream culminates in the permanency of public space within the city. It's a dream that hopes to build more connectivity between the boroughs, utilizing public space and the built environment as a tool for community support and development. It's more than singular public spaces unevenly dispersed throughout the city and serves as a conduit for societal and environmental change. The Green Belt is an exercise in possibilities, and doesn't attempt to handle the confines of reality. Even so, I would like it to be used as a way to dream for a better future and create conversation on how our current public space programs can be better supported. Even without access to planning theory, we all understand the importance of having places where we can congregate and share life with one another. Open Streets, Plazas, and the new Street Improvement Projects have all become new modes of reinforcing the way of living that New York City has become synonymous with. There have already been many steps taken to cement these features into the fabric of the city's built environment, such as the hiring of the Chief Public Realm Officer or the creation of the Public Space Manager Request for Proposal (RFP). These new positions and the renewed focus on funding and supporting public space creates the perfect place for future dreaming to take place. We should ask ourselves how the processes surrounding these programs can be more efficient and easier to understand; how responsibility over these spaces can be more equitably shared between partners and agencies. The future is now, and I can't wait to see how public space continues to grow in New York City.

Sincerely,
Noah Miller