Projects for improving public spaces should be approached with flexibility. They can be broken down into multiple stages, with each stage involving an evaluation process, thus allowing the projects to improve over the course of their implementation by responding to previously unknown conditions. This strategy not only makes the projects more sensitive to dynamics on the ground, but also enables greater experimentation for designers, event programmers, and agency staff. Moreover, it allows residents to voice their feedback at multiple project stages.

**Tactics**

**Allocate sufficient funding for project evaluations at each iteration**

While it’s easy to embrace the ethos of the Jane Jacobs quote “the city is never finished,” it’s more difficult to make this a reality with funding and resources. Breaking down the project-delivery timeline into several iterations can reveal what’s possible, create memorable shared experiences for residents, and inform future concepts. Furthermore, inviting citizens to test initiatives directly (before a large investment is made) can reduce risk and help ensure investments are used most effectively to maximize positive impact. The ways in which citizens use a project—ways that are often unimagined and unintended by the project instigators—are crucial to determining its success. Project monitoring, evaluation, and reimagining should be an ongoing process because the way people use the city is constantly evolving. Our city-making projects should embrace, and plan for, the notion that the city is never finished.

**Make it easier for citizen input to be positive, meaningful, and constructive**

Traditional development processes place difficult demands on citizens, expecting them to understand complex drawings and concepts and provide meaningful input with incomplete information. Instead, ask citizens questions such as, “What is your favorite place in the city and why?” And: “Which of the city qualities identified do you want to see more of in your neighborhood?” Citizens can provide feedback on topics they are experts in. Responses to these questions are naturally more action-oriented and create opportunities for citizens to define the success criteria for projects.
CASE STUDY

San Francisco

Persuasion Through Prototyping—Better Market Street and the Prototyping Festival

Market Street is one of the most congested yet direct routes through San Francisco’s downtown. It serves multiple bus, transit, and trolley lines while simultaneously functioning as the civic spine of the city, connecting the Mission to the Embarcadero. In 2010, the city launched its “Better Market Street” initiative. But after three years, city agencies and Mayor Ed Lee had expended a great deal of political capital with few signs of physical improvements to show for it. A handful of scenarios were developed, yet the city’s preferred option was also the most expensive one, and it remained unfunded. Concurrently, a lengthy environmental review process further delayed large-scale streetscape and transportation improvements.

The Mayor’s Office of Civic Innovation and the Planning Department explored lighter forms of interventions that could show progress and capture the public’s imagination, eventually informing longer-term investments. The group
developed a concept called Living Innovation Zones: it identified ten “zones” along the two-mile stretch of Market Street, found various citizen groups and cultural institutions with an interest in positively contributing to the vitality of the street, and streamlined the permitting process through which the organizations could initiate their programs. The zones along the street provided “canvasses” for a broader set of stakeholders to reimagine how the street could serve as both a public space as well as the city’s transit backbone. This initiative created an opportunity to test various ideas from the Better Market Street design concepts while the city searched for additional funding and embarked on the environmental review process.

Bit by bit, the concept evolved. The first zone, opened in 2012 and curated by the Exploratorium Science Museum, has since been scaled up to five zones, and is buoyed by the advent of the Market Street Prototyping Festival. This three-day festival was initially launched in 2013 as an activist event by the Gray Area Foundation for the Arts and was adopted more formally as a partnership between the Planning Department and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in 2014. Its latest iteration featured 50 projects—from experimental benches to interactive fountains to public bathrooms to play areas—by community members. Leveraging funding from foundations, the city-sanctioned event provided a platform for citizen engagement that made use of the creativity, entrepreneurship, and energy of residents in a way traditional design processes cannot. To inform future events and design techniques, the city evaluated the festival prototypes with Gehl Institute tools to see which installations worked best at fostering social interaction.

The festival’s framework invited citizens to create design products for the street, while streamlining the permitting and logistics process for individual installations (as coordinated by the city). Thus, a more productive, collaborative, and inclusive platform for dialogue was developed between the design/arts community and public health and safety groups. Furthermore, these activities brought attention to the street, spurring the Department of
Public Works to fast-track repaving and lane-striping efforts. The inclusive platforms of the Living Innovation Zones and the Prototyping Festival encouraged residents to say “Yes!” to change rather than retreating into NIMBYism.

Although the preferred option for Market Street is still pending, the city has learned a great deal from these multiple iterations of engagement, activation, and infrastructure improvements. This case study demonstrates how governments can change course to enable citizens representative of the wider population to collectively contribute to brighter city life. Market Street embodies a “permanently temporary” form of city-making that reflects the rapidly evolving urban culture of San Francisco during the past five years.
CASE STUDY

St. Paul

Greenlighting the Green Line—Light Rail on University Avenue

Neighborhoods along University Avenue in St. Paul, which are largely immigrant and low-income communities, have struggled with decades of disinvestment and neglect. When the city, state, and federal governments gathered to support the construction of the Metro Green Line light rail between St. Paul and Minneapolis, the initial plans did not include any stops in these neighborhoods. Although many residents of this area are wary of government-led improvements and have voiced understandable concerns that such initiatives would lead to raised property values and retail rents, which could in turn facilitate their displacement, they did not want to be left out of this transportation development. Locals raised their voices, and Mayor Chris Coleman listened. He fought to add three stops in the neighborhoods but also recognized that residents needed to feel like the infrastructure improvements were truly for them. What was his strategy? Mayor Coleman mitigated the risks of economic loss for small businesses along the University Avenue construction zone by offering forgivable loans equal to the amount of business lost.
during the time of construction. This demonstration of support killed rumors that businesses would lose 50 percent of profits during construction, and it spoke directly to a population that felt at risk. A study from the University of Minnesota has since stated that the Green Line has improved neighborhood access to approximately 2,000 jobs.

The Green Line project became much more than light rail development, prompting improvements in affordable housing, greater access for low-income communities to other areas of the city, and a deeper support of local businesses. In so doing, it gained the support of communities who might otherwise be skeptical of large infrastructure projects. Mayor Coleman has since identified this moment as pivotal in cultivating trust and reducing NIMBYism in the affected neighborhoods.