



# PLACEMAKING TOOLKIT

**A Guide for REALTOR® Association Creation of  
Enduring Community Assets**

Invigorate your community and build coalitions through development of public gathering places.

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# INTRODUCTION TO PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is the process of altering a space in such a way that people are drawn to being there – a place where a pedestrian, instead of walking by, is inclined to stay a while. It is about creating a deliberate environment, large or small, where people can spend time, gather, and feel connected to their community. The presence of positive places can make that community more welcoming, social, and economically viable.


Placemaking fits neatly into the larger concept of smart growth and the ten Smart Growth Principles that define a certain style of growth and development characterized by mixed-use buildings, higher density, and multiple modes of transportation, particularly walkability. One of the Smart Growth Principles is to foster distinctive communities with a strong sense of place.

**The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) has done extensive research on what makes successful places and advocates two concepts in particular. The first is that a place should have these key attributes:**

- **Accessible:** the place is accessible and well-connected to other places in the neighborhood
- **Comfortable:** the place offers comfort, safety, and looks inviting
- **Activities:** people can participate in activities in the place
- **Sociable:** people want to gather, meet neighbors, and come back

PPS calls its second concept the ‘Power of 10’: a great place needs to have at least ten things to do in it or give people ten reasons to be there. The exact number is not critical, but offering a variety of things to do in one spot creates a quality that is greater than the sum of its parts. Something as simple as a park bench qualifies, in that it offers a place to rest, enjoy the fresh air, and watch others.

**REALTORS® are members of the National Association of REALTORS®.**



A site that has benefited from Placemaking, whether it is a sought-out destination or encountered unexpectedly, is an attractive amenity. The site often begins as a place that is the opposite of where people choose to be – a neglected or abandoned locale, such as an alley or a vacant lot. Transformed into a small park, an arts venue, a comfortable seating area, or a pedestrian-friendly hub, the space is imbued with vitality – a trait likely to uplift the surrounding area. It becomes a place that is valued by its community. Neighbors, local businesses, community leaders, and visitors appreciate the space as a destination that uplifts the whole neighborhood.

At their very simplest, Placemaking projects can be a matter of strategic landscaping or painting. At the more complex end of the spectrum, they might involve arts or educational programming, or the installation of lights or a water source. REALTOR® associations across the country have undertaken a wide variety of these projects in urban neighborhoods, rural outposts, woodland sites, and everywhere in-between. The REALTOR® Party offers Placemaking Grants to help offset the costs involved. Depending on the project, these can be relatively modest.

If you've identified a public space to transform, partnering with the municipality that governs the property and is responsible for its maintenance is critical. Joining forces with other organizations that can contribute funding and/or expertise can be helpful too, and joining a Placemaking project in-progress is an opportunity to be involved without the heavy lifting of leadership. All these relationships can strengthen a REALTOR® association's ties within the community, and whether you brand it or not, a project that benefits the community will elevate the REALTOR® image.

**This Placemaking Toolkit provides resources, grant information, and examples of local REALTOR® associations' success in creating meaningful public spaces. Read on to find inspiration for Placemaking opportunities in your community, and guidance to support you through the process.**

**To find out more about National Association of REALTORS® placemaking program, visit [RealtorParty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking](https://RealtorParty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking).**



NAR's Placemaking Grants can be used to create independent places or support a single attribute within a larger project. Check out NAR's Smart Growth Grants, which help support efforts to create a vision for a community, including placemaking education, and policies that foster smart growth development and walkability: <https://realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/smart-growth>

## GETTING STARTED

At their core, placemaking projects funded by an NAR Placemaking Grant are small-scale public-private partnerships. You'll find more on this and the benefits to your association in the next section, *Bring Your Placemaking Project to Life*.

Before applying for the grant, hold a brainstorming session with members and staff to identify possible sites and types of projects; that way, when you talk with your local elected official you will bring some ideas to the table along with the offer of seeking grant funding from NAR.

Develop a timeline, keeping in mind that a Placemaking Grant must be utilized in the calendar year in which it is received. Bear in mind that the process of working with the public sector can be slow, particularly if the project involves construction and needs to meet city standards. The placemaking grant funds projects with a total budget under \$500,000.

Once you have some ideas, line up some meetings at city hall and see if there is interest. As the project progresses, contact NAR staff with any questions, apply for the grant, and once received, keep an eye on the timeline and budget and save all receipts, contracts and invoices for your NAR reimbursement.

**NAR staff can be reached at: [PlacemakingGrants@nar.realtor](mailto:PlacemakingGrants@nar.realtor)**

**The application can be found at: [realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking](https://realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking)**

At an opportune moment in your project's timeline, organize a REALTOR® workday for members to help build planting beds, plant flowers, assemble picnic benches or whatever else needs to be done. The workday is a great opportunity for the media and the public to see REALTORS® in their blue 'R' shirts, creating a space that benefits the community. Likewise, when the project nears completion, work with the city to line up media and local officials to attend a ribbon-cutting event.



There are two levels of Placemaking Grants that support slightly different types of projects:

## Level 1 Placemaking Grants

Level 1 Placemaking Grants fund outdoor demonstration and temporary projects to test a project's viability or inspire permanent projects that increase community livability and downtown revitalization.

### DETAILS:

- Maximum award: \$3,000
- Associations may receive one Level 1 grant per calendar year.
- To be eligible for funding reimbursement, the approved activity must take place within the calendar year of the grant's approval.
- Grant recipients must complete an evaluation form once the supported activity is completed.
- **Please note:** We are unable to offer extensions for delayed Placemaking Grant projects. If a delay will cause your association to miss the calendar-year deadline, please notify us and step back from the grant program until you can confirm the project is ready to move forward. You are then welcome to resubmit and receive your previous grant award. There is no penalty for withdrawing a grant application.

### IDEAS FOR LEVEL-1 ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:

- **Temporary & Pop-up Parks, Pocket Parks and Parklets:** Create a small green space composed of temporary greenery, plantings, and landscaping. Add-in seating and artwork.
- **Temporary & Pop-up Pedestrian Plazas:** Design and implement an area with seating, street painting, and a colorful barrier of planters or art to create a safe space for pedestrians to gather near public transit, in a closed-off street, or in the space under an overpass.
- **Temporary & Pop-up Bike Lanes:** Use colorful temporary tape or street paint to create lanes for cyclists along streets and roads.

## Level 2 Placemaking Grants

Level 2 Placemaking Grants fund the creation of new outdoor public spaces and community destinations that are accessible to everyone and open at all, or most, times. See the list of suggestions below and review Ideas for Using a Placemaking Grant for additional inspiration.

Placemaking Grants now allow funding of community asset improvements such as street benches, lighting, and/or wayfinding signs, as well as improvements to existing spaces.

### DETAILS:

- Maximum award: \$7,500
- Associations may receive one Level 2 grant per calendar year.
- To be eligible for funding reimbursement, the approved activity must take place within the calendar year that the grant was made.
- Grant recipients must complete an evaluation form once the activity is completed.
- **Please note:** We are unable to offer extensions for delayed Placemaking Grant projects. If a delay will cause your association to miss the calendar-year deadline, please notify us and step back from the grant program until you can confirm the project is ready to move forward. You are then welcome to resubmit and receive your previous grant award. There is no penalty for withdrawing a grant application.

### IDEAS FOR LEVEL-2 ACTIVITIES INCLUDE THE SUGGESTIONS BELOW.

#### FOR FURTHER INSPIRATION, SEE [NAR'S SPACES TO PLACES BLOG](#).

- **Parks, Pocket Parks, and Parklets:** Create a park (a large public recreation area), a pocket park (a small park, often in an urban area) or a parklet (a tiny park made from a former street parking space). Include multiple amenities, such as seating and artwork, in addition to the greenery.
- **Dog Parks:** Create a recreational green space for the canines in the community. Include multiple amenities, such as benches, artwork, landscaping, or a walking path, so that residents without four-footed friends can also enjoy the space.
- **Community and Public Gardens:** Create a community garden (a piece of land cultivated by the residents of a community) or a public garden (a garden or collection of plants maintained for the purposes of public education and enjoyment). Once again, be sure to include multiple amenities, such as seating and shade, to enhance the experience of using the gathering place.



- **Playgrounds and Fitness Areas:** Create a playground or fitness area. Include multiple amenities (seating, artwork, greenery or landscaping) so that residents without children and people with limited mobility can also enjoy the space.
- **Trails and Trailheads:** Create a hiking trail or pedestrian footpath through an established public park or through a previously unused plot of public land. Or create a small park at a trailhead (the spot where the trail begins). Ideal amenities for a trailhead include seating, greenery, maps and signage, and a bike-maintenance station or bike rack.
- **Alley Activations:** Convert an alley or a portion of an alley into a public gathering place with the addition of seating, artwork, plantings and greenery, shade screens and lighting. An alley activation can be an ideal place for pop-up businesses, performances, and community events.
- **Pedestrian Plazas:** Create a small area adjoining a sidewalk, intersection, or a transit stop that provides a place for pedestrians to sit, stand or rest. Seating, tables, shade, lighting, and planters are all excellent amenities for pedestrian plazas.
- **Downtown Gathering Places:** Create a new public gathering place in your town or city's downtown area to help highlight local businesses and create foot traffic. Give the gathering place a name that has meaning for your community and host special events, entertainment offerings (live music, free movies, a dance exhibition, etc.), street fairs, or arts and crafts shows. Include seating, tables, lighting, shade, public art, a water feature, etc. Solicit public input to help create a space that represents your community and fosters investment and revitalization.

## BRING YOUR PLACEMAKING PROJECT TO LIFE

NAR's Placemaking Grants and the resulting projects are meant to both strengthen the working relationship between your association and the public sector and make the community a better place to live.

Placemaking projects present a prime opportunity to collaborate with local elected officials, other public-sector representatives, and community partners. This is because NAR-funded placemaking projects must be sited on public land and thus require working with the public sector to find a suitable location, as well as following any implementation guidelines the locality might have.

Also, a local elected official representing the area may have a sense of what sorts of



amenities the residents would value. Having these conversations with elected officials demonstrates that REALTORS® are sensitive to the community's needs and want to create an asset that will be welcomed, used, and leave the community better than it was.

The genesis of a placemaking project could be locating a vacant piece of municipal land and brainstorming what type of asset (community garden, dog park, playground) could be created there to benefit the community; or it could start with a casual conversation with a local public official about the REALTOR® interest in helping to contribute such an amenity for the community.

### **To set the stage for a multi-year placemaking effort, consider the following:**

- Use an NAR Smart Growth Grant to bring in a placemaking expert to talk about various types of placemaking projects and develop a list of activities for a multi-year placemaking strategy. Invite public officials into this educational session.
- Use NAR's Growth Polling Program to find out the kinds of amenities the community desires and use that list to develop a multi-year placemaking strategy. To make the most of this resource, invite your planning department and elected officials to participate.

### **For one-off placemaking projects, consider the following tips for implementation:**

1. Meet with local elected officials to see if there is city- or county-owned land that might be available for a placemaking project.
2. Consider connecting with other community partners to strengthen existing partnerships or develop new ones.
3. Solicit donations of materials from local hardware stores and garden nurseries or use a Placemaking Grant to purchase the materials.
4. Plan a REALTOR® workday to help create the space; invite elected officials to help with the build-out and also to participate in the ribbon cutting.
5. Notify the local press through a brief press release or an invitation to an opening ceremony or workday.

# TEMPORARY PROJECT

Sometimes, you have to see it to believe it. Even a modest temporary project can help residents envision more ambitious changes to the arrangement, functionality, or character of an area. Ideally, this visibility leads to public support, which brings about a more permanent transformation. Temporary projects might help to develop green spaces, or introduce traffic-calming measures, or anticipate a major art installation with strategic splashes of color. Some temporary projects are eventually dismantled, but others are integral first steps within a bigger plan.

- Seek input from the community about a difference they would like to see in their public spaces. A temporary project can then build on ideas generated by this brainstorming.
- If art is involved, put out a call to local artists to participate. This is low-stakes inclusivity: giving community members an opportunity to express their creativity and be seen, without the commitment of a permanent art installation. Children's art can be particularly charming, but should be monitored while in progress.
- Collect feedback from stakeholders about how effective the project is, and if a more permanent version should be pursued. If the purpose was to demonstrate a desired change to local leaders, conduct them on a tour of the project and present the results of the feedback survey.
- State and local REALTOR® associations may apply for a Placemaking Grant to support temporary project-related expenditures.





## Success Story: Temporary Project by MIBOR (IN)

With big employers like Eli Lilly coming to town, the City of Lebanon, Indiana, was anticipating significant growth and transformation. Seizing the moment to promote the beauty of change, particularly in areas of art, culture, and inclusivity, the Heart of Lebanon Main Street organization envisioned a colorful, butterfly-themed installation in the city's 15-block downtown district. The MIBOR REALTOR® Association supported the project with a Placemaking Grant from the National Association of REALTORS®.

Not only did Lebanon's "Catalyst for Change" project help the community warm to the concept of transformation, it proved to be an effective catalyst for more public art.

From March through October 2022, pops of color in the form of larger-than-life butterflies, colorful steel (permanent) butterfly benches, and butterfly sculptures enlivened the district by day; after sundown, lanterns projected colorful colonies of butterflies along buildings and sidewalks. The REALTOR® funding paid for two temporary interactive murals (the kind that encourage photography and social media posting) and eight bollards in pedestrian alleys that local artists transformed into temporary "caterpillars."

The Catalyst for Change project evoked a sense of pride in the local community, sparking a civic discussion about increased investment in the arts for the City of Lebanon. The installation's temporary nature helped to quell concerns of the city's Historic Preservation Commission, which was able to see that, far from being distorted by the contemporary color boost, historic assets were enhanced by it. Not long after the project's limited engagement, the City of Lebanon approved two new permanent murals – just as the organizing partners had hoped.

For the whole story, visit:

[nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/artwork-transforms-an-indiana-community](https://nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/artwork-transforms-an-indiana-community)



## POCKET PARK

A pocket park produces an out-sized impact from limited space. With vision and ingenuity, a relatively small parcel of unused or neglected land can be transformed into a welcoming oasis where people are drawn to meet, rest, or reflect. In the example below, a pocket park in a historically Black neighborhood tells the community's story and restores a corner of dignity and grace to a neighborhood wronged by racist development practices.

- In planning the pocket park, make sure to determine who will be responsible for its maintenance. Consider having a city trash receptacle on site.
- Engage REALTOR® members and local stakeholders in a workday, or series of workdays, to build, plant, and install the elements that are not being done professionally.
- Whether or not the location has historic associations, a permanent sign with some local background and vintage photographs will promote community pride.
- Celebrate the new park with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, or a less formal event. Be sure to invite local officials and the press, to emphasize REALTOR® commitment to the community at the hyper-local level.
- State and local REALTOR® associations may apply for a Placemaking Grant to support pocket park-related expenditures. Funds are restricted to use for projects on public land.





## Success Story:

### Pocket Park by the Fredericksburg Area Association of REALTORS® (VA)

Sometimes, a park is just a park. But sometimes, a park has a story to tell. In Orange, Virginia, for example, where there is now a small and serene green space on the outskirts of a commercial district, there had been a sizeable African American neighborhood that flourished for about a century after the Civil War. Black residents lived, worshipped, and established a variety of successful businesses in the town's southeast quadrant, creating a prosperous community that drew visitors from all over Orange County. All of that changed in the 1970s, when the Federal government appropriated land in the neighborhood to build the Route 15 Bypass and South Madison Road. The negative effect of this "improvement" was immediate and effectively choked off most of the Black-owned businesses either closed or moved away.

In 2021, a coalition of government and nonprofit organizations set out to create a benevolent public space on a diminutive parcel of public land in southeast Orange: a commemorative park with a view of the two remaining African American churches in the town and featuring a series of interpretive markers recounting the history of the neighborhood and the people who once lived and worked there.

Orange County had recently become part of the region served by the Fredericksburg Area Association of REALTORS® (FAAR), and the association was glad for the opportunity to support a project that would welcome it to the fold. FAAR joined the coalition and with a Placemaking Grant from the REALTOR® Party, was able to help fund the park's landscaping and interpretive panels; several FAAR members who

are also involved with the Virginia Mainstreet Program took an active role in developing the project. The ribbon cutting ceremonies featured powerful storytelling, reminiscing, and poetry recalling the soda fountain, barbershop, dance hall, car dealerships, and emporiums that once anchored the lively community. Today, the new "pocket park" recognizes the injustice suffered by the neighborhood and provides a local gathering spot for reflection and inspiration. The coalition also hopes that, in time, it will serve as a catalyst for economic development, its strategic location bridging the former Black commercial district and the vibrant bar and restaurant scene of present-day Orange.

For the whole story, visit:

[nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/commemorative-park-celebrates-historic-african-american-neighborhood](https://nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/commemorative-park-celebrates-historic-african-american-neighborhood)



## DOG PARK

**A place that's gone to the dogs...** can be a wonderful thing for a community. Dedicated parks provide space for dogs to frolic and enjoy canine company, and help to balance all the trails, playgrounds, and public spaces governed by leash laws. In terms of amenities, they can run the gamut from bare bones to high-end, but most will at least have a water source and a solid maintenance plan, so strategic partnerships will be key. A Placemaking Grant can fund fencing, fountains, landscaping, and play features, as well as conveniences for human patrons, like seating and shade.

- Establishing a dog park from scratch can be a heavy lift, so find well-suited partners to share the load.
- Signs, equipment, and benches donated by your association can be branded to show the park's human patrons that REALTORS® value four-legged friends.
- Dog parks tend to attract a loyal community – some even have their own social media accounts, which is a good way to keep up with events and promote the REALTOR® brand.





## Success Story:

### Dog Park by the Space Coast Association of REALTORS® (FL)

The Space Coast Association of REALTORS® serves the real estate needs of Florida's Brevard County; it also has a soft spot for Brevard County's dogs. With Placemaking Grants from the REALTOR® Party, it has supported the construction of three dog parks in as many years.

When the City of Melbourne publicized the concept of its very first dog park on Facebook in 2019, the REALTORS® responded by offering up the vast volunteer power of their Community Outreach Committee. They secured their first Placemaking Grant to bring to the project and supplemented that with funding of their own.

The first park, built on vacant public property, became a canine wonderland complete with water features, an agility course, an interactive tunnel system, and plenty of seating and shade. It was designed to be made entirely of sustainable materials. Local businesses, contractors, and a generous private philanthropist contributed labor, materials, and funding so that there was no construction cost to the city, which assumed responsibility for maintenance. The REALTORS® support paid for thirteen colorful Adirondack chairs manufactured by a local plastic recycling company, each one bearing a prominent REALTOR® 'R' and a slogan promoting the value of REALTORS® in the community.

Based on the success of this park, the city launched a second dog park initiative, and then a third. Each time, an unused space is transformed into a beloved community asset with multiple community sponsors. To each of the dog parks, the Space Coast Association of REALTORS® has contributed its branded chairs and the sweat equity of its Community Outreach Committee. For the canine population of Brevard County and those who love them, these Placemaking projects prove the REALTORS® understand the value of quality of life for all, including man's best friend.

**For the whole story, visit:**

**[nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/paws-fur-celebration-happy-dog-happy-owner](https://nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/paws-fur-celebration-happy-dog-happy-owner)**



# COMMUNITY GARDEN

In a world where sustainability and food insecurity are growing concerns, community gardens are growing solutions. All but the very simplest require a certain amount of infrastructure – like a water source and basic administrative oversight – so seeking partnerships is a good idea. Once these are secured and a location is identified, a Placemaking Grant can be used toward construction of beds, fencing, tools, equipment, supplies, and signs. In the example below, a garden attached to a community center produces exponential growth, by teaching local residents the skills they need to create gardens of their own. Establishing a dog park from scratch can be a heavy lift, so find well-suited partners to share the load.

- Local community centers or departments of recreation are ideal partners for garden projects, as they may have access to land and possibly even staff to manage ongoing coordination of use and maintenance.
- Garden centers and nurseries also make good partners, and are often willing to contribute materials, equipment, and labor to community projects. They may also be a good resource for educational programs at the garden.
- As you plan, consider the needs of the community: raised beds make gardening easier for many seniors and those using wheelchairs.
- Once the garden is producing, consider finding a way to share the bounty with those in need, perhaps by contributing to a local food bank, or establishing a first-come, first-served community plot.
- State and local REALTOR® associations may apply for a Placemaking Grant to support community garden-related expenditures.







## Success Story: Community Garden by the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® (VA)

When a new community center was being built to serve one of the most affordable areas of Virginia's Fairfax County, the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® (NVAR) stepped forward and asked how they could be involved. High on the facility's wish list was a Community and Educational Garden.

The new Lee District Community Center is adjacent to a 700-unit mobile home park and several large affordable housing developments: a community where food insecurity and lack of access to fresh and nutritious food is a persistent problem. The proposed garden would provide fresh produce, much like any vegetable garden. But in doing so, it would also be helping residents in the surrounding area learn how to grow food in gardens of their own. The prospect of fostering a healthier, stronger, and more economically viable community resonated strongly with NVAR's REALTOR values, so with support from a Placemaking Grant, it partnered with the County, the District Supervisor, Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, and the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District to make the innovative community project a reality.

NVAR funded the construction and preparation of the garden site, including aluminum raised garden beds, fencing, benches, topsoil, compost, tools, and more. On an early spring day, REALTOR® volunteers joined a team of project partners to construct and fill the nine garden beds in a small grassy area near the community center's parking lot, just in time for the first growing season. Fairfax County Parks and Recreation installed lights and a new water hook-up, and managed neighbor participation. The garden has proven to be a vibrant, accessible destination for community enrichment, and all who are involved in its growing and maintenance share in the harvest.

Fresh food and self-sufficiency aren't the only things this garden is growing: its success has prompted discussions about replicating the model elsewhere in the County, bringing the benefits of small-scale sustainable gardening skills to even more communities.

**For the whole story, visit:**  
[nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/  
northern-virginia-association-of-  
realtors-brings-community-together-  
through-gardening-at-new-lee](https://nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/northern-virginia-association-of-realtors-brings-community-together-through-gardening-at-new-lee)



# PLAYGROUND

Any community with children needs a place for children to play. Placemaking Grants can be used to create engaging play spaces, from a single climbing structure in a safe setting to elaborate recreational parks. Seating and shade are amenities that will increase a playground's appeal to grown-up companions, too. Involving REALTOR® members and affiliates in the planning and construction adds value and builds community.

- Structural elements – i.e., grading, cement pouring, splashpads, and installation of playground equipment – should be handled by professionals. Engage REALTOR® members and other stakeholder volunteers for workdays requiring less skilled labor such as mulch spreading, landscaping, and assembling seating and tables.
- Promote the new playground with a press release and through social media. A grand opening event with an ice cream truck lends a festive touch to the occasion.
- State and local REALTOR® associations may apply for a Placemaking Grant to support playground-related expenditures.





## Success Story: Playground by the Latah County Board of REALTORS® (ID)

The Viola Community Center in Viola, Idaho is a cheerful, barn-style building set against a picturesque backdrop of the rolling Palouse Hills. It was built in 2018 to serve as a revitalizing hub for the rural bedroom community, which had long since lost its commercial main street. When it was time to construct its playground, the center found an eager partner in the Latah County Board of REALTORS® (LCBOR), who shared its vision of renewal through placemaking.

An engineering analysis had shown that the planned site, which is on a floodplain, required significant work before the playground could be installed. To bring the site into compliance with state requirements, it had to be excavated and graded, with borders and proper drainage established, and covered with synthetic wood chips to the state's recommended depths for the specific playground features. LCBOR secured a Placemaking Grant from the REALTOR® Party and matched the amount with funds of its own to cover the site construction, the material cost of the landscape fabric and low-maintenance rubber playground mulch, and unforeseen cost increases caused by extended weather delays. At long last, over the course of three weekends, about half a dozen LCBOR volunteers joined others from the community in rolling up their sleeves and laying the specialized foundation. The playground equipment was purchased with a grant from the Idaho Community Foundation.

Now, when community events from weddings to farmers markets are held at the new facility, Viola's youth have a place to gather and play. As the only playground in town, it is much used and much loved – and the local REALTORS® are recognized for their contribution of leadership, funding, and elbow grease.

**For the whole story, visit:**

[nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/placemaking-project-brings-the-fun-to-viola-idaho](https://nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/placemaking-project-brings-the-fun-to-viola-idaho)



# TRAIL / TRAIL HEAD

REALTORS® know that access to outdoor recreation brings value to a community. Creating a trail or enhancing a trailhead (the space that marks the start and finish of a trail, often near parking) is a practical way to associate the REALTOR® brand with the great outdoors, involve members in a fresh air project, and forge partnerships with like-minded organizations and businesses. A trail-building activity on public land can also be a positive way to strengthen a relationship with the jurisdiction in charge.

- Consult or partner with the local or state parks and recreation department as you seek a trailhead or trail-building project.
- Have a plan for maintaining the trail or trailhead.
- Organizations that value outdoor activity, like scout troops and outing clubs, might welcome opportunities to help build or maintain the area.
- Branded signs, maps, and benches remind visitors that REALTORS® care about the community's quality of life.
- State and local REALTOR® associations may apply for a Placemaking Grant to support trail-related expenditures. These grants must be used for projects on public land.





## Success Story: Trail/Trailhead by the Greater Hartford Association of REALTORS® (CT)

In the central Connecticut region served by the Greater Hartford Association of REALTORS® (GHAR), an extensive network of hiking and mountain biking trails was, until recently, accessed by an empty trailhead. The association's Community Involvement Committee turned that blank slate into an opportunity to collaborate with the Rocky Hill Parks & Recreation Department and enhance public enjoyment of the great outdoors: with a Placemaking Grant from the REALTOR® Party, they created a welcoming "pocket park" that marks the entrance to Dividend Pond Trails.

The funding enabled GHAR to have an L-shaped concrete slab poured at the site near the parking lot, as well as providing a bench and low-maintenance plantings. The bench, sourced from a local training and employment non-profit serving disadvantaged residents, bears a branded plaque noting GHAR's placemaking role and the public reminder that "REALTORS® are Good Neighbors!" A member of the Community Involvement Committee, who is also a master gardener, enlisted two local Girl Scout troops to help with the plantings, including a flowering dogwood tree; the scouts earned merit badges for their efforts. Rounding out the trailhead's new amenities are a bike-tire filling station and a bike rack, both donated by the Central Connecticut Health District (CCHD), a department that promotes and encourages healthy behaviors.

GHAR was pleased and proud that the project brought so many groups together for a common goal. As is often the case when collaborating with a municipality, the REALTORS® found they had to adapt their accustomed pace to the bureaucratic process, but the many months of meeting and organizing with town officials resulted in a strong partnership that underscores the affinities shared by the community and the association. When the new and improved trailhead was officially opened at a festive event coinciding with National Trails Day and NAR's REALTORS® Volunteer Days, Rocky Hill's mayor and state representative were on hand to perform the ribbon cutting.

**For the whole story, visit:**

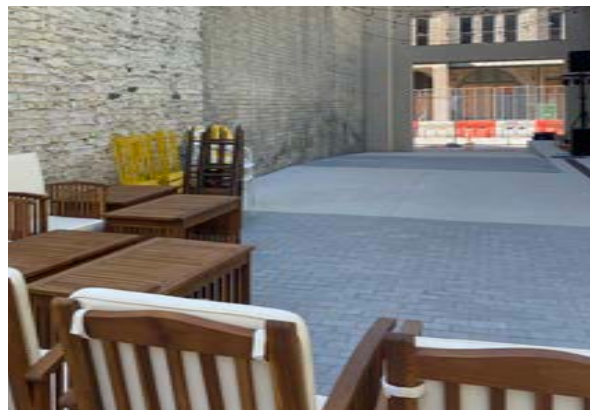
[nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/new-pocket-park-created-at-trailhead](https://nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/new-pocket-park-created-at-trailhead)



# ALLEY ACTIVATION

The most dramatic Placemaking happens when the least likely spaces are brought to life. A little imagination can transform a previously unused alley into a destination – for performances, gatherings, or simply open-air relaxation. Activating an alley that is adjacent to or connecting other attractions unifies and elevates the entire area, which becomes greater than the sum of its parts. These projects bring REALTORS® into productive partnerships with a private property owner or the municipality’s maintenance department. A Placemaking Grant can be used to provide lighting, seating, art installations, landscaping, directional signs, and more.

- Once you have identified an alley to activate, you'll need to secure permission from the entity that oversees the space, and building owners, along with any necessary permits from the local authorities.
- As you work on the design concept, be sure to devise a plan for maintaining the space.
- Be a good neighbor: partnering with the owners of the buildings flanking the alley you've identified is a good approach to an alley activation project. This is especially important if your vision involves lighting, for which you'll need access to electricity, or involves the buildings themselves, such as murals.
- Invite neighbors, partners, and REALTOR® members to help paint, plant, and otherwise prepare the new alley space.
- Celebrate your community's new passageway with a grand opening event. This is a great opportunity to engage local officials, stakeholders, and the press. Festive touches, like live music and a food truck or two, can help demonstrate its promise as an attractive gathering place.
- State and local REALTOR® associations may apply for a Placemaking Grant to support alley activation-related expenditures. While these grants must be used for projects on public land, an exception is made for murals painted on an adjacent building as part of an alley activation.





## Success Story:

### Alley Activation by the San Antonio Board of REALTORS® (TX)

Some cities have all the luck. In San Antonio, Texas, a non-profit called Centro San Antonio is focused on Placemaking and achieving great results. Impressed by its success with a visionary project called Peacock Alley, the San Antonio Board of REALTORS® (SABOR) approached Centro to help devise the next big thing. The result is “La Zona,” a buzzworthy alley activation in what had been a long-abandoned block within the Cultural District, home to many of the city’s iconic locations. The vibrant new gathering space now engages the community with free arts programming featuring area creators and performers. In addition to serving as an open-air incubator for the local arts, the alley provides the adjacent commercial street with an appealing neighbor that draws even more visitors to the area.

Using a Placemaking Grant from the REALTOR® Party, SABOR funded La Zona’s landscaping, as well as staging and production elements for the partly open, partly covered arts space. During the project’s development, the REALTORS® also provided volunteer support through various committees; now, SABOR members love attending association events and celebrations in the attractive new space. The family-owned real estate investment and development company that owns the property is also a strategic partner, and Centro San Antonio sustains and maintains the destination – including booking the performers and exhibiting artists.

Because La Zona’s purpose includes generating an economic “halo effect”, Centro is gauging the boost it provides to surrounding businesses and neighborhoods through visitor traffic data collected from mobile devices, together with qualitative data from partner, vendor, and stakeholder testimonials. The REALTORS®, meanwhile, understand the enhanced quality-of-life value the exciting new alley brings to the city, and are already planning their next collaboration with Centro San Antonio.

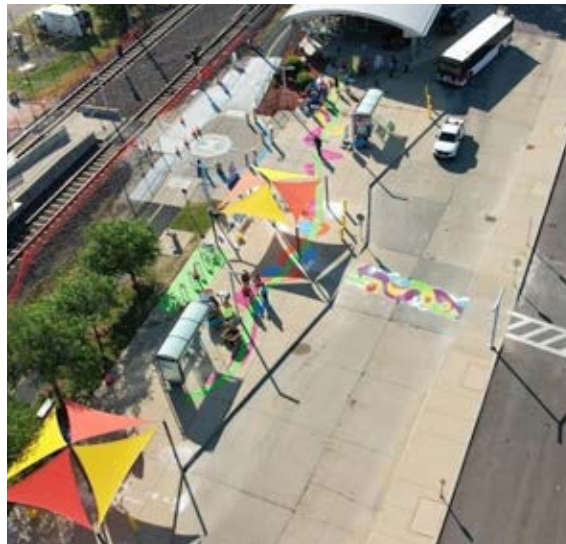
For the whole story, visit:  
[nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/la-zona-lights-up-san-antonio](https://nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places/la-zona-lights-up-san-antonio)



# PEDESTRIAN PLAZA

A location that is central to pedestrian activity can function as a “home base” in a community. Whether developed from scratch, or created by enhancing an existing area, an attractive and engaging plaza projects a friendly and safe welcome to those on foot. A Placemaking Grant supporting features like traffic barriers, landscaping, pavement painting, shade, and seating can be leveraged to attract other partners and investment; REALTOR® volunteer labor can generate goodwill and build neighborly relations. In the example below, the plaza is a beautified extension of a transit hub. Once you have identified an alley to activate, you’ll need to secure permission from the entity that oversees the space, and building owner/s, along with any necessary permits from the local authorities.

- Pedestrian plazas are a good entry project to placemaking, as they can run the gamut from a simple outdoor “lounge” on a small space adjacent to a sidewalk to more ambitious installations involving cross walks and traffic barriers.
- Look for opportunities to create a pedestrian plaza in an area where members have had challenges getting business done. A positive contribution to a neighborhood could be the goodwill gesture that changes attitudes.
- Engage REALTOR® members and local stakeholders in a workday of painting, planting, and installation. At the end of the day, celebrate the place you have made with cold drinks and warm thanks!
- State and local REALTOR® associations may apply for a Placemaking Grant to support pedestrian plaza-related expenditures. The funds are restricted to projects on public land.







## Success Story:

### Pedestrian Plaza by the REALTOR® Association of Southwestern Illinois (IL)

Where there had once been a drab and dilapidated depot site, commuters in Belleville, Illinois now enjoy a vibrant pedestrian plaza when they come and go on the region’s bus and MetroLink train systems. This transformation was the latest of the systematic transit-hub renovations led by Citizens for Modern Transit (CMT), a regional non-profit; it was the second benefiting from Placemaking Grants secured by the Southwestern Illinois Board of REALTORS® (SIBR). The fact that rising fuel costs were driving an increase in mass transit ridership – a phenomenon that disproportionately affects minority communities – made the board especially committed to uplifting the commuter experience in this underserved area.

Working together with AARP, the St. Clair County Transit District, and the City of Belleville, the REALTORS® and CMT transformed the concrete area between the bus bays and the train entrance into an engaging and interactive space. It now features brightly colored custom bike racks, shade structures and benches, and colorful, eye-catching artwork stretches throughout the pedestrian plaza. SIBR’s contribution, including additional funds raised by members, covered the greenery and the massive, bright blue concrete planters that contain it. About twenty SIBR members stepped up and got their hands dirty at a community planting day.

SIBR’s first collaboration with this partnership was the 2021 creation of a greenspace/arts plaza at the Emerson Park Metro Station in East St. Louis, a success that made throwing support behind the Belleville project the following year an obvious choice. Placemaking Grants and REALTOR® volunteer power bring added value to these ventures, and the board has found that joining a “plug-and-play” project like the transit hub renovations makes it easy to be involved without the heavy lift of designing and implementing a project from scratch. Being able to benefit the community in a politically neutral way, strengthen ties with a broad range of partners, and further the REALTOR® brand makes it a win-win-win.



# STORYBOOK TRAIL

Picture books posted page-by-page along a gentle trail are a fun way to engage the minds, bodies, and outdoor spirit of young and aspiring readers and their communities. Promoting an early start on literacy and physical fitness, the Storybook Trail is a multi-tasking placemaking concept that is both simple and flexible: any child-friendly trail can be enhanced with colorful pages at child-eye-level, and the books can be switched out on a regular basis to maintain anticipation among local young readers. Local schools, camps, and daycare facilities can use the trails during the week, while families may be more likely to seek them out on weekends.

- Consult a children's librarian or early-years teachers about book choices.
- Book pages will have to be laminated. Take the pages directly from the book; do not alter them in any way, including size, to avoid copyright infringement. Be sure that the author, illustrator, and copyright information is included on at least the first installment in the series of pages.
- Seek out a local craftsperson to construct sturdy stands or platforms for the pages.
- Involve REALTOR® volunteers in installing the stands and the pages, adhering to any guidance from the entity that governs the trail.
- Keep engagement high by installing fresh books on a monthly or seasonal basis. Announce each new book on the trail via social media, public libraries, and local elementary schools. The local newspaper and radio stations might be willing to publicize the book update as a public service announcement.
- State and local REALTOR® associations may apply for a Placemaking Grant to support storybook trail-related expenditures. These funds must be used for projects on public land.

In 2007, Anne Ferguson of Montpelier, Vermont, a specialist in chronic disease prevention, was seeking fun ways to get families outdoors and moving. She hit on the idea of posting the pages of a children's book along a local nature trail, and the Storybook Trail was born. Storybook (or story walk) trails now add a literary dimension to parks, library campuses, and nature trails in every state and around the world. The books displayed might inspire wonder or silliness, teach about the natural world, or share a local legend. They can be changed-out to reflect regional seasonal highlights such as bird migration or the life cycle of a leaf. Whatever the story, and whatever its tone, it serves as a focal point for children along a walk in the great outdoors.

Partnering with the local Department of Parks and Recreation or Department of Education is a good way to access promising locations such as public libraries, schools, and recreation centers that are sited on property extensive enough to accommodate a new storybook trail. Even simpler than creating a trail from scratch, is enhancing an existing child-friendly trail with the storybook posts.

For partners on the storybook side, look to local literacy agencies, libraries, and local book stores.

Because durability is a prime concern, the pages must be water-proofed and installed on a frame or platform designed with weather in mind. Another good feature is the ability to replace the books from time to time. Frame options are available online, but you could also consider commissioning custom structures from a local woodworker or metal shop; many senior centers have woodworking shops with skilled retirees who might be happy to volunteer their expertise for a community project. Depending on the trail site and the nature of the page posts, installation will vary from trail to trail, but one thing is certain: it calls for a workday – or workdays – involving REALTOR® members and other partner-volunteers, and a festive celebration of the community's new fitness-and-literacy asset.



# RESOURCES

## **1. Spaces to Places Blog**

[nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places](https://nar.realtor/blogs/spaces-to-places)

This is NAR's Placemaking blog, where you can learn about actual projects that have been implemented across the country. The posts feature REALTOR® associations who have received a Placemaking Grant.

## **2. Placemaking Grant**

[realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking](https://realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking)

NAR's Placemaking Grants help state and local REALTOR® associations to create new outdoor public spaces from unused or underused sites. In doing so, the program enables REALTORS® to strengthen ties with their community, to develop relationships with public officials, and to spur economic growth and development by drawing the public to new places.

## **3. Smart Growth Grant**

[realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/smart-growth](https://realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/smart-growth)

Smart Growth Grants support state and local REALTOR® Associations' efforts to advance programs, policies and initiatives aligned with one or more of the 10 Smart Growth Principles (<https://realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/smart-growth/principles>). Smart Growth Grants can set the stage for a Placemaking project or provide training on placemaking methods.

# OTHER PLACEMAKING RESOURCES

1. Project for Public Spaces:  
[pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking](https://pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking)
2. Congress for the New Urbanism:  
[cnu.org/resources/wwhat-new-urbanism](https://cnu.org/resources/wwhat-new-urbanism)
3. American Planning Association:  
[planning.org/knowledgebase/creativeplacemaking/](https://planning.org/knowledgebase/creativeplacemaking/)
4. Main Street America:  
[mainstreet.org/home](https://mainstreet.org/home)
5. Better Block:  
[betterblock.org/](https://betterblock.org/)
6. Urban Land Institute Creative Placemaking Resources:  
[americas.uli.org/creative-placemaking-resources/](https://americas.uli.org/creative-placemaking-resources/)
7. AARP: Livable Communities Program. Learn more:
  - Creating Community Gardens for People of All Ages:  
[aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2023/creating-community-gardens.html](https://aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2023/creating-community-gardens.html)
  - The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit:  
[aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2019/pop-up-tool-kit.html](https://aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2019/pop-up-tool-kit.html)
  - Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages: A Step-by-Step Guide:  
[aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2018/livable-parks-guide.html](https://aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2018/livable-parks-guide.html)

# CONTACT US

Thank you for reading the Placemaking Grant Toolkit.

For additional information on the Fair Housing Grant and to access the application, please visit the REALTOR® Party website at [realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking](https://realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking).

Questions? Please contact NAR staff at [PlacemakingGrants@nar.realtor](mailto:PlacemakingGrants@nar.realtor)



# TESTIMONIALS

“ It was a really good project, and the community loved it—especially after the first growing season. We’re in talks with the county to see about expanding it and establishing similar gardens elsewhere. ”

**Josh Veverka**

Senior Director of Government Affairs,  
Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS®

“ This has been an amazing project to watch unfold. It really shows...that we care about their community and are willing to invest in it. ”

**Kim McClellan**

Public Policy Director, Fredericksburg  
Area Association of REALTORS®

“ The beautification and activation of this pedestrian place truly gives the neighbors a sense of community and caring. It was an extremely worthwhile project. Our association was able to work with a great number of partners to further the REALTOR® cause and brand. We had a positive impact, and our relationship with the City of Belleville is even stronger.” ”

**Ron Deedrick**

Local Government Affairs Officer, Southwestern Illinois Board of REALTORS®

“ Not only were we able to use this project as a catalyst for other temporary placemaking projects around the region, but on the strength of it, two permanent murals have been approved by the city! ”

**Maddie Love**

Economic and Community Development  
Liaison, MIBOR REALTOR® Association

“ We received a ton of great feedback from the public and town officials. We received excellent social media engagement with the posted photos from the ribbon cutting. ”

**Keara Langston**

Communications Director, Greater Hartford  
Association of REALTORS®



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