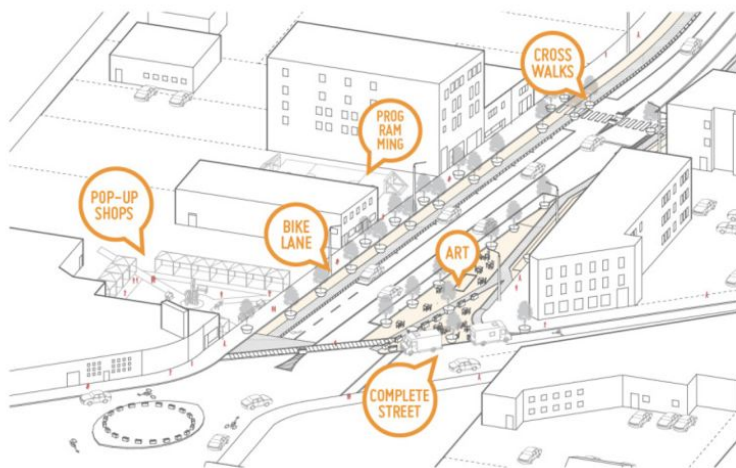


How to Build a Better Block



The Better Block project started in April 2010, when a group of community organizers, neighbors, and property owners gathered together to revitalize a single commercial block in an underused neighborhood corridor. The area was filled with vacant properties, wide streets, and few amenities for people who lived within walking distance. The group brought together all the resources from the community and converted the block into a walkable, bikeable neighborhood destination for people of all ages complete with bike lanes, cafe seating, trees, plants, pop-up businesses, and lighting. The project was developed to show the city how the block could be revived to improve area safety, health, and economics if ordinances that restricted small business and multi-modal infrastructure were removed. Since that time, Better Block projects have been developed throughout the world with many of the temporary infrastructure improvements and businesses made permanent.

The Better Block is an open-sourced project that is free to re-use and build upon, though we ask that individuals and organizations that use our work credit us under our [Creative Commons License](#).

This site is developed to provide help for communities that wish to build their own Better Blocks complete with news, tools, and other resources they may need to help rapidly revitalize neighborhoods. Our consulting firm, [Team Better Block](#), assists cities with planning, designing, and measuring the impacts of Better Block as an alternative to the typical urban planning process. We have a variety of services that will elevate the success of your project. For more information on consulting, email info@teambetterblock.com.

We've found it's best to address the following four areas when developing a Better Block, which we will break down in greater depth below.



SAFETY



SHARED ACCESS



STAY POWER



AMENITIES

Safety (Real and Perceived). If an area feels unsafe, then everything breaks down. Whether it be business, school, or neighborhood revitalization, the key to changing a place is addressing its perceived safety. When approaching blocks, we ask:

- Does it feel safe to cross the street?
- Does it feel safe to stand on the sidewalk?
- Does it feel safe to linger in the area?
- Does the area have hidden corners or large obstacles that reduce open sightlines?
- Is the area filled with debris, graffiti, overgrown landscaping, etc.?
- Do the businesses have bars on the windows or opaque windows?

Our goal is to address each of these questions and find ways to improve the area rapidly.

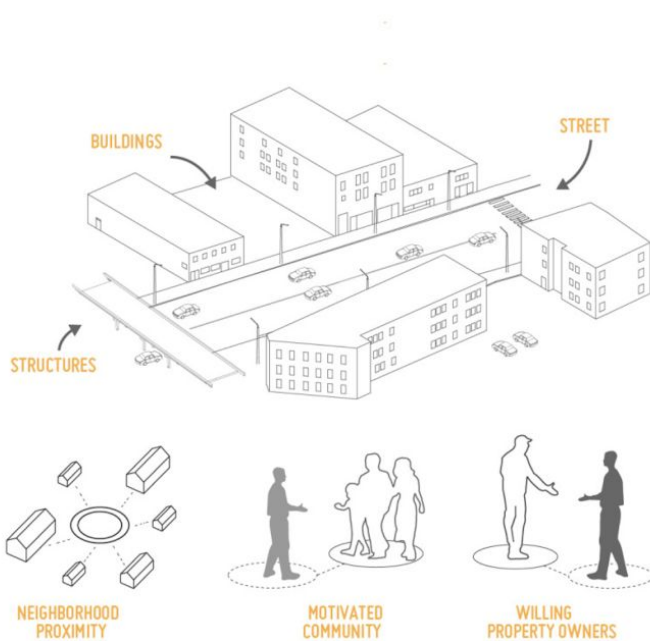
Shared Access. The next goal we focus on is looking at ways to bring more people into the area by various modes of transportation. We ask:

- Do pedestrians have easy and clear access to the area?
- Do bicycles feel welcome in the area?
- Is the area easily accessible from neighborhoods?
- Are there way-finding signs that direct people into and out of the area?
- Are there amenities that allow people to linger in the space (seating, tables, etc.)?

Stay Power. By stay power, we mean how can we encourage people to visit the area, have them linger, and invite their friends? To answer this question, we ask:

- Are there food options on the block?
- Are there places to eat outdoors?
- Are there maps, bulletin boards, games, or other amenities that encourage people to linger?
- Is the identity of the area prominent (arts district, cultural district, historic area)?

8-80, Dog-Owners. Lastly, we look at amenities that create invitations for everyone—from babies to 8-year-olds to 80-year-olds, and beyond. These groups tend to be indicators of a healthy environment that feels welcoming and attracts other people.



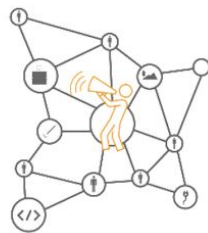
Preview the area for best possible Better Block locations. We've created [a quick survey](#) that helps us identify strong candidates.

Ideally, locations with a block of buildings that have good pedestrian form, but lack a complete street are preferred, but we've developed Better Block projects in areas that failed to meet much of the criteria identified in the survey. It's still possible, but the project will only be as successful as the community you partner with. Typically, areas built pre-war have good possibilities. Also, review former streetcar intersections at your local library to help identify small commercial corridors that are nestled into neighborhoods. Proximity to a neighborhood is the most important factor when putting together a Better Block.

Create a free [wordpress.com](#) or [blogspot.com](#) site to provide the community information on the project. Also, create a facebook event so others can like the project and begin forwarding details to your contacts within the community.



MAP YOUR BLOCK



ASSEMBLE A TEAM

Post your event on the Better Block Group Map. We've setup a collaborative map for anyone interested in developing a Better Block project [here](#). Pin the block you want to repair and be sure to provide links so others can take part.

Assemble a team of grassroots community activists, nonprofit groups, businesses, artists, and DIY'ers. College students, urban planning/architect associations, young business professionals, and local [Etsy](#) groups have been some of our strongest partners for Better Block projects.



LATCH TO AN EVENT

Latch the Better Block to an existing event, such as an art crawl, ciclovía, fun run, etc. More than likely, the area you're revitalizing has been offline and most residents don't know to return to the area. We've developed food events, bike rides, and more that celebrate a community's identity while aligning the effort with a Better Block area. Work with your city to permit the project using either a block party permit or assembly permit. Start this process at least 60 days prior to your date.

ACCESS VACANT SPACES

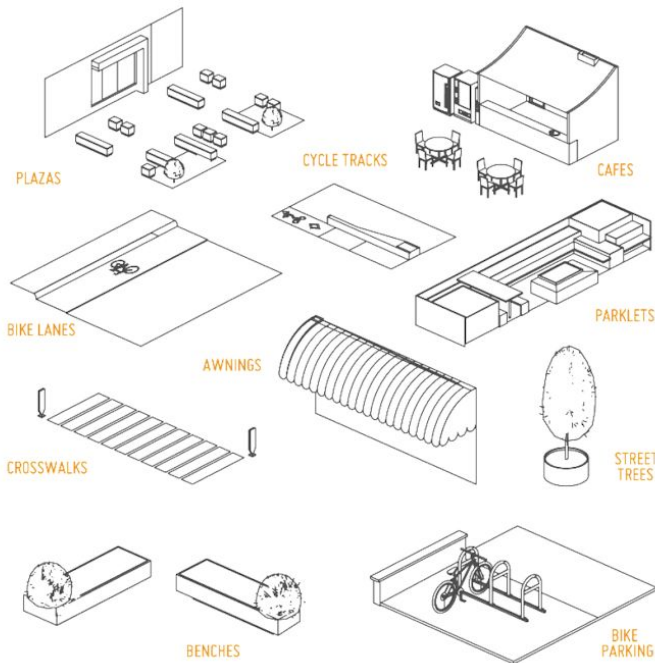


ACTIVATE WITH POP-UP BUSINESSES



Work with area property owners to allow access to vacant spaces for a weekend. In the past, we pitched events as giant “art installations,” so the vacant spaces become defacto art galleries. Our property owners were excited to freely allow access because we were actively marketing their properties. Also, immediately following our original Better Block, several of these vacant spaces were leased.

Create groups to develop and install temporary “pop-up” businesses to show the potential for what could be if the street had a more inviting presence. Also, try and keep in mind all users (young, old, etc.). We installed a cafe with outdoor seating to highlight the ability to re-utilize the space given to cars. We also created a kids’ art studio so families could be involved, and a flower/gift market filled with local craft goods. You could also do a book-drive collection, and create your own small bookstore as well with what is collected. You don’t have to get overly elaborate with your product offerings. For cafes, coffee out of a pump urn is simple, inexpensive, and can create an inviting experience. If possible, work with existing local businesses to help fill the storefront with product. The goal should be to place as many local products as possible in each of the shops.



Include as many people-friendly aesthetics. We’ve worked with local props warehouses to bring in planters and temporary street lighting to help divide the street. You can also build your own planters and sandwich boards from old pallets. We’ve strung simple bailing wire between buildings at 15’ high (above a semi-truck’s lowest clearance), and attached recycled holiday lights to help provide more ambiance.

Calm the street with bike lanes. Work with your city to test the viability of bike lanes, cycle tracks, dedicated transit lanes, or expanded sidewalks. White duct tape works extremely well as a replacement for paint. Also, [we’ve mixed our own removable paint](#) using equal parts flour, corn starch, and water which quickly dissolves at the end of the project. Spray chalk or tempera paint is also an alternative.

Invite artists to perform in the street. Music is a key component to having an exciting street. Use a guitar amplifier and play tracks from an iPod or invite DJs or drum circles to bring a soundscape to the block.

