



For Immediate Release

THE HIGH LINE NETWORK LAUNCHES THE COMMUNITY FIRST TOOLKIT, A GUIDE FOR EXPANDING EQUITY IN PUBLIC SPACES

Developed with the Urban Institute and Harvard School of Design, the Toolkit Addresses Inequities Caused by Infrastructural Racism

New York, NY (May 18, 2022) —The High Line Network, a program of the High Line that supports a group of nonprofit organizations transforming underutilized infrastructure into new urban landscapes, today announces the launch of its [Community First Toolkit](#). Developed by the High Line Network in partnership with the Harvard Graduate School of Design and the Urban Institute, the Community First Toolkit is an equity-based action planning resource for practitioners in the field of infrastructure reuse, as well as city officials, urban planners, nonprofit leaders, and other community members.

Infrastructure development has been a key means through which inequity has been inscribed across the landscape. The construction of highways that tore through predominantly Black and low income communities, redlining policies that determined who could and could not own homes in certain areas, and other forms of uneven investment in different neighborhoods have had long-lasting and disproportionate economic, health, and environmental impacts across racial and income lines.

The Community First Toolkit aims to address inequities caused by historic and persistent infrastructural racism by putting community first in design, budgeting, and all phases of park planning. Fifteen Network members collaborated with research partners over two years to build a new, practitioner-based process and set of tools to do this work. The resulting Community First Toolkit is designed to help park organizations address inequities caused by infrastructural racism, and shape public spaces that bring social, environmental, and economic benefits to communities.

Through the aid of 18 digital tools, the Toolkit provides a structured process to understand the influence and impact of infrastructure reuse in their community and build equity-based action plans. The process includes the following steps:



- *Examine the history of a community:* identify its demographics, organizations, institutions; map equity challenges and assets; build historical timelines with key milestones with community members; combine and review these takeaways to understand the impact of infrastructure and past policy.
- *Center equity:* shape a vision for equitable impact; outline the actions to take towards that impact; review current initiatives to see what efforts are needed.
- *Prepare internally:* review the internal governance for equitable decision making; track how equitably budgets are allocated; share power and governance with community members; publicly communicate goals.
- *Build partnerships:* determine whether collaborators are aligned; identify partnership gaps; evaluate community engagement; maximize where the most impact can be made in and out of the organization.
- *Ensure progress:* establish a blueprint for the organization; track progress metrics; share the story of impacts with the public and funders

In addition, the Toolkit is supported with stories of Network member experiences, showcasing how the Toolkit can and has been used to tackle real-life park organization challenges.

"What we hope the Community First Toolkit does is show all park organizations, no matter their size or development stage, that the right time to start centering community in your work is now," said Asima Jansveld, Managing Director of the High Line Network. "It doesn't matter if you're still in design or fully operational—everyone has a starting point in moving our cities to be more equitable and inclusive. We hope this Toolkit becomes the standard for makers, funders, and partners of public spaces in holding themselves accountable to the people they serve."

"High Line Network members and others who are reimagining existing infrastructure as inclusive public spaces must invariably face the legacy of historic and contemporary racism that impacts these places," said Peter Tatian, a Senior Fellow in the Urban Institute's Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center. "To ensure that public spaces are welcoming to all, the Community First Toolkit helps people tackle equitable development challenges across the spectrum of their work: from planning, to implementation, to tracking progress."

"Race is treated more as an area of specialization than the endemic cornerstone of society and space that it is," said Stephen Gray, Associate Professor of Urban Design, Harvard University, Graduate School of Design. "The Community First Toolkit is designed to help cities and civil society organizations contextualize their projects within legacies of racialized policy and practice—illuminating the complicated relationship between systemic racism and the production of space—and equip them to tackle impediments to community resilience."

The Toolkit is available online at: <https://toolkit.highlinenetwork.org>. An introductory booklet

([available digitally as a PDF](#)) accompanies the Toolkit, serving as an overview and including historical context around infrastructural racism, as well as framing definitions, goals, and stories around the Network's processes of creating equitable impact. Nineteen case studies from Network members across the United States are included to illustrate the use of the tools and the results they produced.

On May 18, 2022, at 2:30pm EDT, the Urban Institute will host [a virtual launch event](#) for the Toolkit. Speakers from Urban Institute, Harvard Graduate School of Design, and Network members will explore the tools and the processes they developed, and their key findings. They will discuss their experiences, reflecting on the lessons they've learned while measuring the impact they're creating.

ABOUT THE HIGH LINE NETWORK

Presented by the High Line, the High Line Network is a group of infrastructure reuse projects—and the people who help them come to life. As cities become denser and land for traditional parks becomes more scarce, residents are finding creative ways to bring greenspace to their neighborhoods. Projects in the High Line Network transform underutilized infrastructure into new urban landscapes. Redefining what a park can be, these hybrid spaces are also public squares, open-air museums, botanical gardens, social service organizations, walkways, transit corridors, and more.

For more information about the High Line Network, please visit network.thehighline.org.

ABOUT URBAN INSTITUTE

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization that provides data and evidence to help advance upward mobility and equity. We are a trusted source for changemakers who seek to strengthen decision making, create inclusive economic growth, and improve the well-being of families and communities. For more than 50 years, Urban has delivered facts that inspire solutions—and this remains our charge today.

ABOUT HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN AND CODESIGN

CoDesign at Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) seeks to tighten links between teaching, research, practice, and activism. It builds on the GSD's design studio and research tradition, spans different programs, and involves students, fellows, alumni, and faculty in matching the appetite and resources for applied projects within the GSD with collaborative opportunities from nonprofits, community groups, civic organizations, and government agencies in Greater Boston and beyond. Aligned with our Community Values Statement and Dean's Diversity Cabinet, CoDesign aims to enhance the community relevance and impact of urban planning and design education and training at the GSD as well as deepen pedagogical and learning experiences. Development of the Community First Toolkit involved graduate researchers enrolled in the seminar/workshop "Urban Design and the Color-Line" and paired with High Line Network organizations to unpack and expand their racial equity agendas.



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