

# Better Block PSU: Request for Project Proposals

**Better Block PDX and  
Portland State University**

A partnership program of the Transportation Research and  
Education Center (TREC) at PSU





# 2021 Better Block PSU: Request for Project Proposals

*Transportation Research and Education Center (TREC)*

*Portland State University (PSU)*

Better Block PSU is a partnership program between the public spaces advocacy nonprofit Better Block PDX and Portland State University. Partnering since 2015, we have developed implementation plans and designs for many community-driven transportation projects. These projects promote equitable placemaking, community building, and active transportation that meet community needs. TREC at PSU has adopted this program under our umbrella of transportation education initiatives, and it is integrated into PSU planning and engineering classes each year.

We are seeking proposals for our 2021 round of projects. We recognize that COVID-19 has drastically impacted the ways we gather, move through our city, and engage with our communities. Though these projects will begin virtually, the final events and long-term implications of these projects may not be virtual. We encourage applicants to consider COVID-19 recovery when applying and take into consideration that your project may or may not happen in person this summer. For more information on Better Block projects, see our Guide to Better Block Projects below.

Applications from organizations that support and/or are led by historically marginalized groups will be prioritized in order to facilitate an equitable process. Up to \$1,000 is available to assist participants with the planning and implementation of their projects.

## How to Apply

**Applications are due Monday, March 15th at 8pm.** Please [submit your application online](#) and send any site designs as PDF attachments to [treceducation@pdx.edu](mailto:treceducation@pdx.edu) with the subject line "2021 Better Block Proposal"

**Questions?** Contact Nora at [treceducation@pdx.edu](mailto:treceducation@pdx.edu) and/or join us on Tuesday, February 23rd at 12pm for an online Q&A session. This will be recorded for those who cannot attend. [Register for the Q&A here.](#)



## Overview

We are seeking proposals from organizations and individuals who have visions for placemaking projects that prioritize equity and transportation. These projects are powerful community organizing strategies because they don't rely on traditional bureaucratic permitting processes, and are led by the community itself. More benefits of Better Block projects can be found in the Guide to Better Block Projects below and on [Better Block Foundation](#). If selected, you will participate in the Better Block PSU Pathway program, outlined in the table below. The phase at which your project will begin will depend on the maturity of the project concept. For example, projects that are at the initial conception stage may be recommended to start in Phase I. Projects that have already integrated community engagement may start in Phase II, and projects that have already gone through engagement, design, and funding stages may begin at Phase III. Once selected, you will work with TREC staff to determine a sequence through the pathway program that is best suited for your project concept. In each phase, you will be paired with a group of PSU graduate students who will work with you over the course of 3-6 months to develop plans, reports, and graphics to support the development of your project. See our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for more information on the deliverables unique to each phase.

## Timeline

- **Monday, March 15th at 8pm:** Proposals due
- **Friday, March 19th:** Selected projects will be notified. If you were not selected, you will be notified the following week after all projects are confirmed.
- **Weeks of March 22nd & 29th:** Orientation to the program in which we will work with you to identify which phase of the Better Block Pathway fits your needs.
- **April - June 6th:** Phase I - Students will create reports, plans, and graphics to help lay the foundation for your project. TREC staff will check in monthly on how partnership with students is going and provide additional support.
- **September - December 2021:** Phase II - Students will create a detailed planning report to hone in on design alternatives and costs. TREC staff will check in monthly on how partnership with students is going and provide additional support.
- **January - June 2022:** Phase III - Students will create a detailed engineering plan to assist with the City permitting process. TREC staff will check in monthly on how partnership with students is going and provide additional support.

## Better Block PSU Pathway

Phase	Months	Course	Deliverables	Purpose of Deliverables
<b>Phase I</b>	April - June 2021	Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning	Activity and behavior monitoring, data collection plan, public participation plan, and performance measures	This course helps with some of the big picture visions for the project, and how to engage community prior to designing the project
<b>Phase II</b>	September - December 2021	Active Transportation Planning and Design Studio	Detailed planning document that includes existing conditions, design alternatives, and cost estimates	Cost estimation can help with applying for funding, design alternatives can determine what materials are needed and to be able to visualize the physical space the project needs
<b>Phase III</b>	January - June 2022	Engineering Capstone	Detailed engineering plan that includes design alternatives, traffic control plan, and other materials that can assist with city permitting process	The engineering plan is helpful prior to implementation with securing permits and materials based on design alternatives

## Application Questions (to be filled out on [our online application](#))<sup>1</sup>

1. What is the location of your proposed Better Block project?
2. What is this place like currently?
3. What steps (if any) have you already taken around this project?<sup>2</sup>
4. Do you know of any existing partnerships or events that could help leverage this project?
5. What ideas do you have for re-imagining this space?
6. How do you plan to engage community stakeholders?

<sup>1</sup> The Google Form should take about 15-20 minutes to fill out

<sup>2</sup> This helps us determine which part of the Pathway you will start out in. It is okay if your project is just an idea right now.

7. What are some ways to make the space inviting for all?
8. Who are the local leaders and champions for this idea?
9. What are the desired outcomes?
10. How might you measure success?

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What deliverables should I expect?**

Deliverables are the content produced from the students that you can expect to take with you to help develop your project. Final deliverables from the Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning course in Phase I include activity and behavior monitoring, data collection plan, public participation plan, and performance measures. Deliverables in Phase II, Active Transportation Planning and Design Studio, include existing conditions, design alternatives, and cost estimation. Final deliverables in Phase III, Engineering capstone, include design alternatives, traffic control plan, and promotional materials.

### **How might these deliverables be useful?**

The deliverables from students in Phase I focus on the big picture vision for community through engagement plans and behavior monitoring. These are meant to assess the current activity of the project site, to give you a base to then form your future plans. Since community engagement overlaps all phases, it is important that we start out with engagement in Phase I. The deliverables in Phase II are meant to build upon Phase I, but with more of a technical lens. These deliverables will provide you with more of the nuts and bolts you'll need to implement the project itself, including the anticipated cost. During this phase, you will move from theory into more of the practicalities of your project. Phase III deliverables are useful in beginning conversations with the City, and gathering the materials necessary to obtain permits for the project. This last set of deliverables shifts the focus outward and helps to ease the bureaucratic components of the project.

### **How can I use the seed money?**

It is up to you how you want to use this money. You may choose to compensate volunteers, subsidize the cost of materials, or something else.

### **How will COVID-19 impact this process?**

All PSU courses are remote for the Spring and Summer, which means your involvement with students will be primarily through Zoom. There may be an opportunity for physically distant site visits to occur. Traditionally, Better Block projects have had a strong in-person element to them because of the emphasis on community building and placemaking. It is up to you if you want to

plan your project to be implemented when COVID-19 isn't a concern, or to tie it in with COVID-19 recovery.

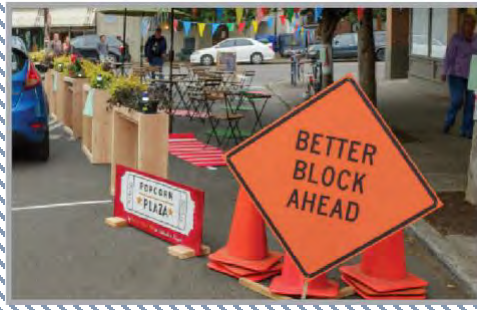
### **What should I expect from the students?**

The students will maintain regular communication with you throughout the term, and will partially be working on deliverables on their own. It can be helpful to establish parameters with your student group during your first meeting around what level of communication you need. Please note that if your project moves through multiple phases, you will have a new student group in each phase.

### **What level of commitment should I plan for?**

Some of our most successful projects that have come from this program, such as Better Naito, have slowly been chipped away over many years. It is up to you if you want to participate in Phase I to implement this summer, and concentrate your efforts into a few months, or if you want to spread it out over a year or two due to the complexity of the project.





# Guide to Better Block Projects

## Better Block PDX



Photos: Jonathan Maus/Bike Portland (top left, middle right), Greg Raisman (bottom right), Better Block PDX (others)



# What Makes a Good Project?



## Community Involvement

A collaborative process brings people together and reinforces a sense of community while producing an outcome tailored to a community's character and needs. In being actively involved in the project, people are more supportive of permanent change.

## Low Risk, High Reward

While these projects are often temporary and taken down quickly, their purpose is to demonstrate value as permanent improvements. There is little to lose if a pop-up project is unsuccessful at achieving its purpose, but there should be potential to spark long-term change.



## Light, Cheap, and Quick

Giving community members and city leadership a taste of what a place is missing with limited resources raises the question of how a permanent solution can be done even better. A sudden change in the streetscape brings an element of surprise to those who may have taken a place for granted.

## Attention, Curiosity, and Conversation

A good project does not go unnoticed by a passerby. Having eye-catching elements can spark curiosity and conversation, and make it more memorable. It should also be inviting to everyone and allow for a variety of different uses.





## Community Events and Markets

A community event is a good situation to debut a Better Block project. Masses of people who are drawn into such events would be right there to experience the change in streetscape.



Travel Portland

Portland, OR



Travel Portland

Portland, OR

## Block Parties

You may be surprised to learn just how inexpensive it is to obtain a block party permit through the City of Portland. Like larger community events, block parties are a good way to bring a neighborhood together and build community.



PBOT

Portland, OR



Sarasota Police Department

Sarasota, FL

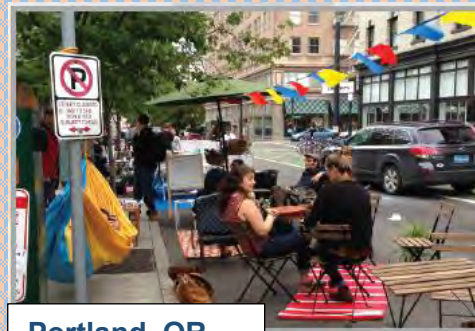
## Street Seats & Parklets

The idea for converting parking spaces into short-term or long term parks or seating areas is attributed to San Francisco-based Rebar Group, and has been implemented in cities across the globe.



Building Active Anaconda Team

Anaconda, MT



Better Block PDX

Portland, OR



## Ideas & Examples

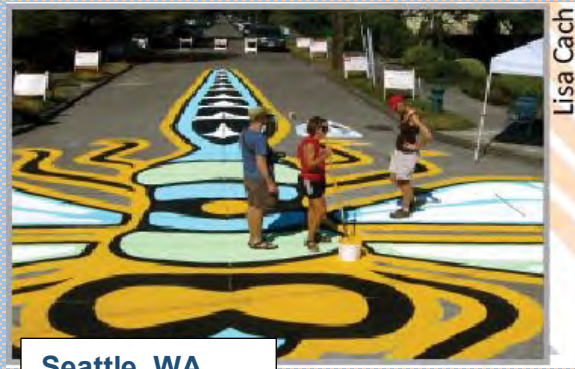
### Intersection Painting

Activities as simple as painting an intersection fosters interaction among neighbors and establishes a sense of community pride.



Greg Raisman - Flickr

Portland, OR



Lisa Cach

Seattle, WA

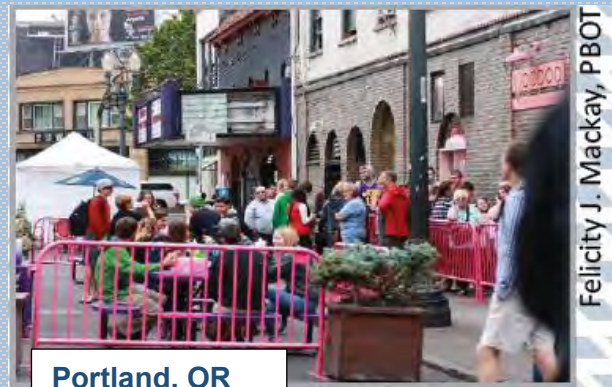
### Pedestrian Plazas

Excess street space where there is a lack of activity are prime for Pedestrian Plazas. They should be designed to promote a variety of activities such as eating or drinking, meeting up, people-watching & passing through.



Jim Simmons  
Living Streets LA

Los Angeles, CA



Felicity J. Mackay, PBOT

Portland, OR

### Bicycle Facilities

Pop-up bicycle facilities attract all types of cyclists, including those who would otherwise feel uncomfortable riding a bicycle in the street. They also give concerned business owners an idea of how it would affect them.



Better Block PDX

Portland, OR



Urban Repair Squad Toronto

Toronto, ON



# Ideas & Examples

## Play Streets

Popularized in New York City and London, play streets bring organized and supervised play to areas with otherwise limited recreation opportunities for kids.



New York City, NY



Seattle, WA

## Open Streets / People Streets

Events like Sunday Parkways typically take place on single weekend days. They open up the street to pedestrians and cyclists for a more social environment.



Portland, OR



Minneapolis, MN

## Pop-up Crosswalks

Crosswalks are tricky to implement, even as short-term pop-up projects, but they go a long way in making a street more comfortable and accessible for pedestrians.



Seattle, WA



Portland, OR



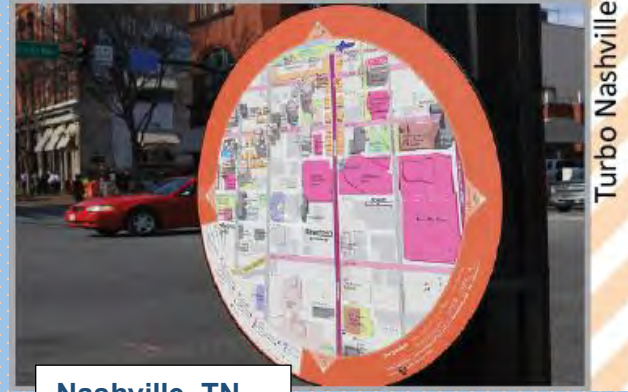
# Ideas & Examples

## Signage

A simple arrow with your travel time or distance to destinations highlights walking as a convenient way to get around. Walk [Your City] signs feature QR codes for walking directions on a mobile device.



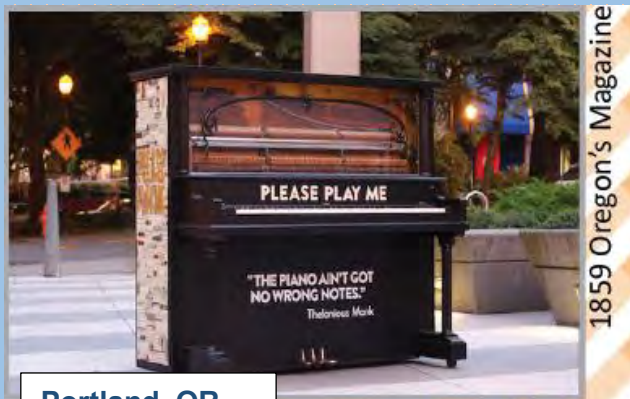
Raleigh, NC



Nashville, TN

## And More...

A Better Block project doesn't need to conform to an above category. It can be unprecedented or unusual. Playable pianos, umbrella canopies, interactive art pieces, and a pop-up tea truck are just a few examples of what can come from originality. Time to get creative!



Portland, OR



Ageuda, Portugal



New Orleans, LA



Portland, OR

# Resources

[Portland in the Streets](#)

[AARP Pop-Up Demonstration Tool Kit](#)

[Crosswalk Guidelines for Portland](#)

[Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper Transformation of Public Space](#)

[Safe Routes to School Pop-Ups](#)

[Quick Builds for Better Streets](#)

[Street Mix](#)

[Tactical Urbanism Guide](#)

[How to Create Safe Routes to School Pop-Up Projects](#)

*This Guide to Pop-Up Projects was developed by  
Better Block PDX*