

Quality of Place

> Overview

Technological disruption, public health scares, and pushback against systemic disparities have all elevated the importance of and demand for quality places in urban settings. In a world where technology and infrastructure enable people and businesses to locate anywhere and collaborate virtually, cities and regions increasingly need to evaluate and refine the value proposition that they offer to their residents.

The concept of quality of place—including but not limited to walkability, transportation assets, cultural amenities, job opportunities, educational resources, open space, and recreation—is not a new concept in discussions around economic competitiveness and resident/business attraction and retention. But it is often centered around placemaking strategies and has been discussed for the last decade at least as a way to attract the creative class to a region.

However, the shifting norms in virtual/remote work that have accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing spotlight on inclusivity and equity in our communities, the qualities and characteristics that people value have shifted. In a distributed world where workers can live and work anywhere, the very value proposition of cities as a place where diverse groups can come together at scale to learn, create, and recreate is at stake. That means that quality places will need to equitably advance accessibility, promote wellness, and foster innovation.

How do cities and regions cultivate quality of place in their communities? And what types of investments in place attract people in our increasingly competitive and mobile economy? Answering these questions will be crucial for cities to re-assert their centrality in a thriving and equitable future. These measures of quality will be crucial for our cities to address holistically—and are of pressing importance to local governments, developers, place-based organizations, institutions, and businesses alike. The future success of cities will rely on intentional, strategic investments and planning in infrastructure, resources, and people in ways that make cities places of choice and opportunity for all its residents.

> Questions to Pose

ESI Center for the Future of Cities wants to examine what makes urban communities attractive and inclusive places for all people and identify clear steps that cities can take to be a competitive place of choice for future residents:

- What kinds of metrics best indicate that a community or region is competitive in attracting and retaining residents?

- What places are leaders in addressing equity and inclusion in their planning and policy making?
- What typologies of quality of place exist across US communities?
- How are cities, community-based organizations, and the private sector currently cultivating quality places through their policies, placemaking activities, and investments in real estate and infrastructure?
- What key investments in people, place, and services can cities make to enhance their value proposition to residents, businesses, and visitors?

What should emerge from research into these questions is a roadmap for the ways that cities, regions, and neighborhoods to understand the indicators of quality of place that matter most to the people that they want to attract to their community. These findings will be critically important for policymakers seeking to cultivate equitable and inclusive growth in their communities; in addition, there will be clear takeaways for organizations, investors, and businesses to understand the role they serve in contributing to the quality of place where they reside.

> Methodology

ESI Center for the Future of Cities' team of urban economists and thought leadership experts will conduct a rigorous research program, comprising rich quantitative and insightful qualitative analysis that may include but are not limited to:

- Review and aggregate existing studies, surveys, and indices on urban quality of life metrics.
- Identification of 10-15 small urban communities across the US to serve as case studies for research plan.
- An online survey of planners, developers, and community-serving organizations, government officials to incorporate their perspectives on how quality of life is considered in communities undergoing growth or change.
- Synthesis of existing economic and demographic measures and current quality of life metrics to develop a quality of place index.
- Performance impact models to analyze the economic and equitable development impacts of current and potential investments that communities are making to reach their social, environmental, and economic goals.
- A benchmarking tool to enable cities to understand the types of quality measures they excel in and areas to improve.
- In-depth case studies of places that excel at fostering inclusive, quality communities of choice with insights into key areas where they perform well and their practices and performance results.

> Program Deliverables

To maximize the impact of this work, ESI Center for the Future of Cities can provide a variety of thought leadership assets and analytical resources which may include:

- E-book with infographics and executive summary
- Benchmarking tool of metrics and rankings, including the supporting data of city information
- Regular advisory board meetings to guide research and promotion

- Marketing materials produced in tandem with a robust marketing and communications campaign
- Sponsor-branded microsite for the research program, updated as appropriate

> Project Plan

ESI Center for the Future of Cities has initiated this effort with a preliminary period of research, from which the following steps can proceed:

Months 1 - 2: Recruit sponsors and research/data partners, establish project scope and work schedule.

Month 3: Collect secondary research, line up primary research process.

Month 4 - 5: Collect primary research, reconcile with secondary research to develop preliminary findings.

Months 5 - 6: Socialize preliminary findings with sponsors and research partners, compile and test iterative versions of all deliverables, produce and activate promotional strategy.

Month 7: Public delivery of findings and promotional strategy.

> Sponsor Benefits

In addition to the program deliverables, sponsors will enjoy the following benefits:

- Direct input into the research methodology, scope, and questions.
- Ability to shape the research agenda and network with other industry leaders through advisory board meetings.
- Full rights to use all program research and deliverables for internal and external purposes, including for developing your own branded materials.
- Top-quality thought leadership and evidence-based analysis to build brand awareness and generate sales leads.
- Wide brand exposure on all program deliverables and marketing materials.
- Opportunities for co-marketing and joint business development with other sponsors and research partners.
- Targeted networking – if desired, the ESI Center for the Future of Cities team will involve the sponsor’s key clients and prospects in advisory panels and one-on-one interviews.
- Ongoing personal access to the ESI Center for the Future of Cities team to help you build the analysis into tailored go-to-market plans and thought leadership programs