

Vibrancy Index

A new tool for understanding and measuring neighborhood vibrancy



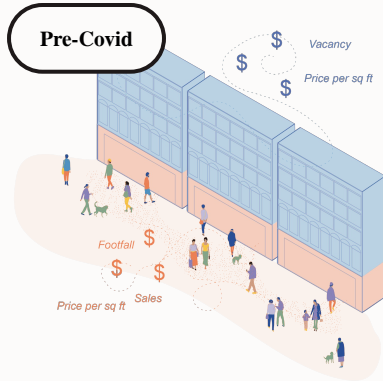


The Vibrancy Index offers a new model for understanding and cultivating the nuanced balance of what we "see" and "feel" in our urban spaces, ensuring that our cities are not just productive, but livable.

In an era of evolving urban landscapes and shifting human behaviors, understanding and fostering the vitality of our cities has never been more critical. SF New Deal's Vibrancy Index is a timely and essential tool, designed to move beyond traditional, often limiting, metrics to capture a holistic and nuanced picture of urban vibrancy.

This index is developed from a collaborative spirit, drawing insights from public and private stakeholders. It acknowledges that vibrancy is not a singular concept but a complex construct that encompasses many interrelated factors such as economic resilience, social inclusion, cultural relevance, accessibility, and belonging.

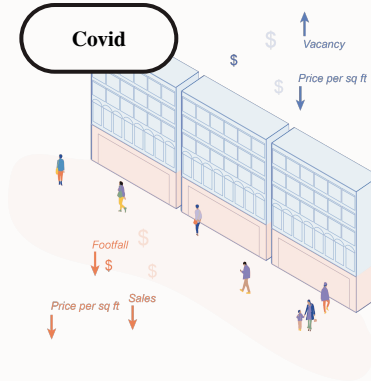
Why we need new measures of success



The 2019 version of Downtown SF was a monoculture —narrowly productive, highly vulnerable.

Yet 2019 Downtown is often identified as a benchmark of success. Who was that version of Downtown serving? Was it resilient?

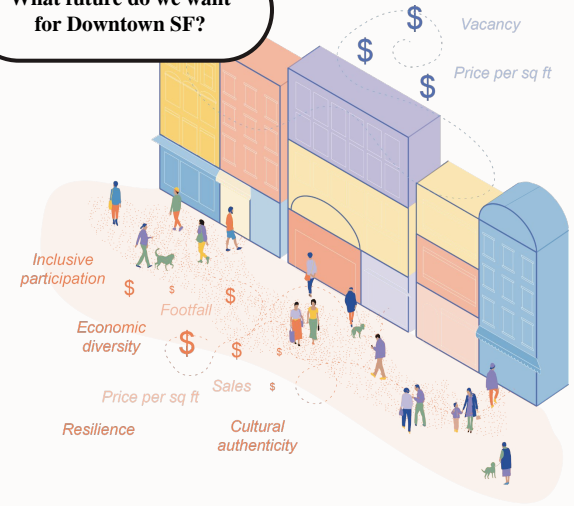
The goal is not a return to 2019 conditions, it is to move forward with new vision.



Conventional indicators of success (foot traffic, sales volume, pp sf) don't reflect the full picture.

The cost of the overreliance on a single revenue model for Downtown San Francisco created fragility in the face of disruption, led to the displacement of locally and culturally rooted businesses, and resulted in a lack of a clear definition and identity. It looked productive—until it wasn't.

What future do we want for Downtown SF?



We have the opportunity to redefine value in terms that matter for long-term vitality and resilience. To do so we need new measures of success.

The Vibrancy Index is both a common vision of what vibrancy means for future of Downtown San Francisco, and a tool to incentivize policy and investment in what we care about as a city—economic diversity, cultural authenticity, community resilience and inclusive participation.

This prototype is an in-development framework and methodology for measuring vibrancy.

Union Square was the initial pilot area.

We are determining a baseline as we support neighborhoods to be vibrant and mixed-use - where people want to live, work, and play - and where cultural identity can flourish.

The Vibrancy Index aims to provide ground-level insights that complement traditional data points like retail sales and foot traffic. It seeks to answer fundamental questions: How can we create conditions that support small business success and foster genuine community connections? What draws people to a place, not just for a fleeting visit, but for a rich, multi-stop experience that extends beyond 9-to-5?

By tracking new metrics, the index offers a framework for understanding how people interact with their environment.

The Vibrancy Index is more than a data collection tool; it is diagnostic and fosters shared language for stronger collaboration. It seeks to inform grantmaking, investment decisions, and partnership strategies, guiding public and private sector investments towards creating robust, resilient, and truly inclusive urban ecosystems.

If we're looking at the same information and understanding it in the same way, we can make more informed and collaborative decisions, together.



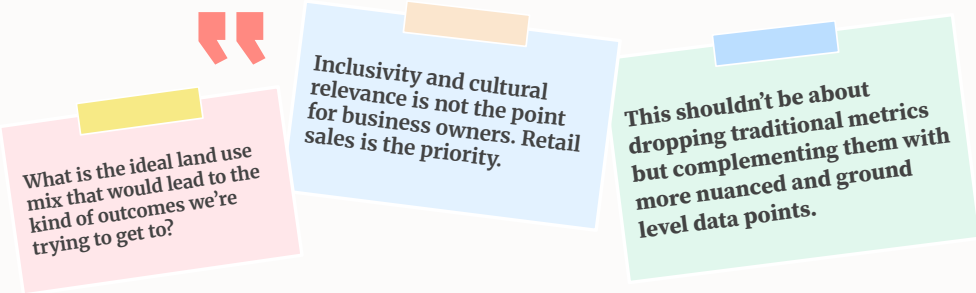


Defining Vibrancy

A Placed-based, Collective Process

What drives *vibrancy*? Insights from stakeholders

Our process included **informational interviews with key stakeholders**. We sought their insights on what vibrancy meant to them and what we should consider.

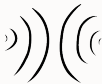


Vibrancy Drivers - Stakeholder Insights



Diversity of uses and users

A diverse mix of businesses, activities, and people (locals, workers, tourists, across demographics and income levels). This includes diversity in price points, types of interactions, and cultural programming.



Social Intimacy

The "feel" of a place, including a sense of welcome, knowledge of the community, cultural identity, and the question of whether people feel they can shape what happens in the area.



Resilience and Collective Stewardship

Alignment among all stakeholders involved in shaping the area's character to create a resilient and healthy ecosystem, moving away from monocultures that, despite appearing productive, are susceptible to risk.



Beyond 9-to-5

A 18-hour or 24-hour destination, active with amenities and stores open late, and patterns of use that complement each other.



Context-Dependency

Vibrancy is context-dependent, meaning it may look different in Union Square compared to other neighborhoods or cities.

Initial Definition

Vibrancy emerges from the ongoing interplay between **energy and novelty**—the sparks of activation, diversity, and cultural expression—and **belonging and care**—collective stewardship, inclusivity, and community connection.



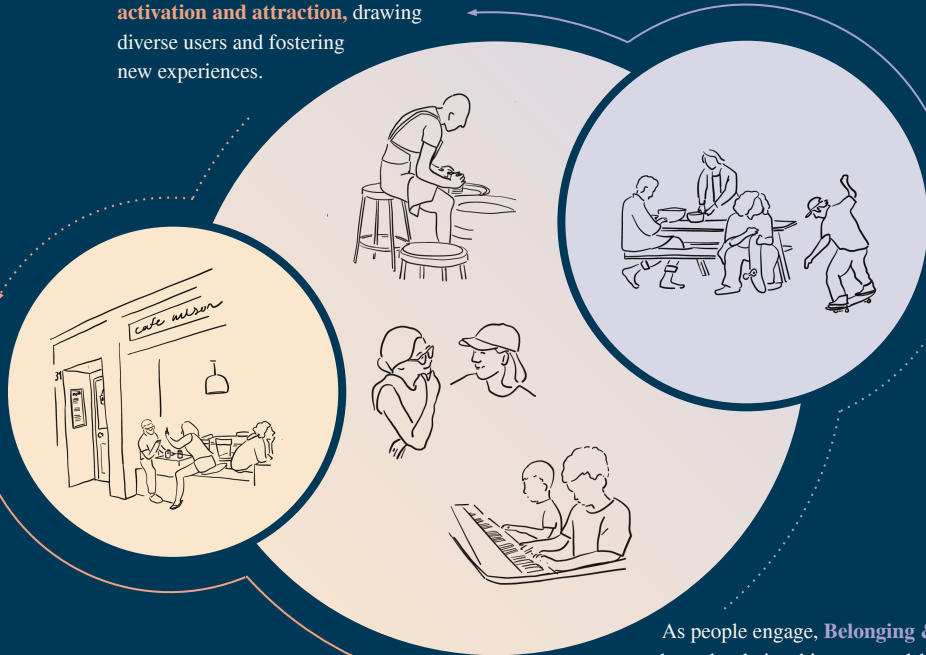
Energy and Novelty

reflects the *activation* of a place —its intensity, diversity, and opportunities for discovery.

Energy & Novelty fuels the **initial activation and attraction**, drawing diverse users and fostering new experiences.

Key dimensions include

- Invitations for new experiences and discovery
- Intensity of uses
- Diversity of users and cultural expressions
- Place-based identity that excites



Belonging & Care

reflects the *depth of connection* and stewardship that grounds and sustains vibrancy.

Key dimensions include

- Stewardship and ongoing care of the environment
- Diversity and Inclusivity
- Sense of welcome and safety
- Accessibility and ease of participation
- Connection among community members

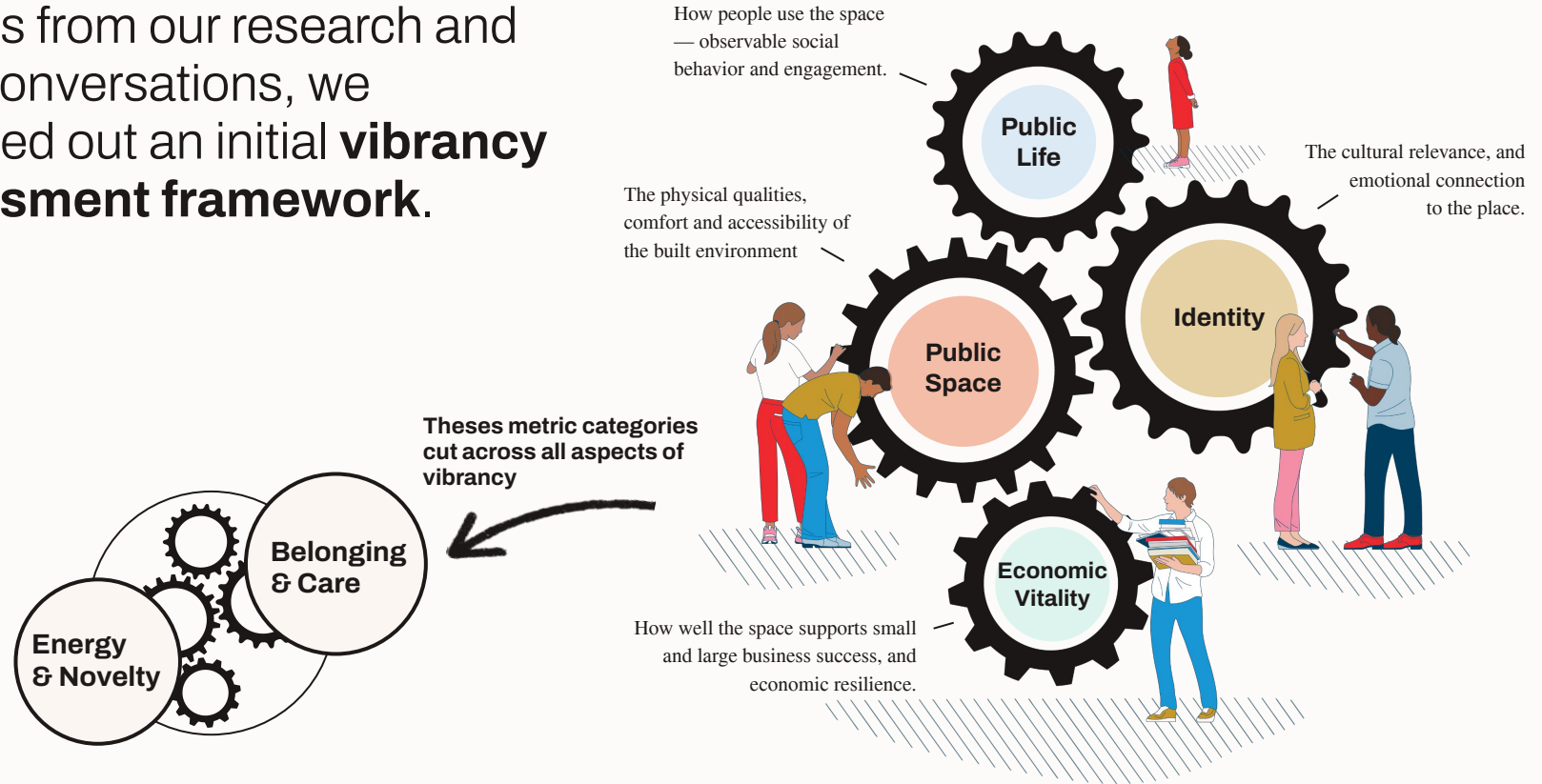
As people engage, **Belonging & Care** grow through relationships, stewardship, and inclusivity, which in turn **deepen the sense of place** and encourage ongoing activation.

2

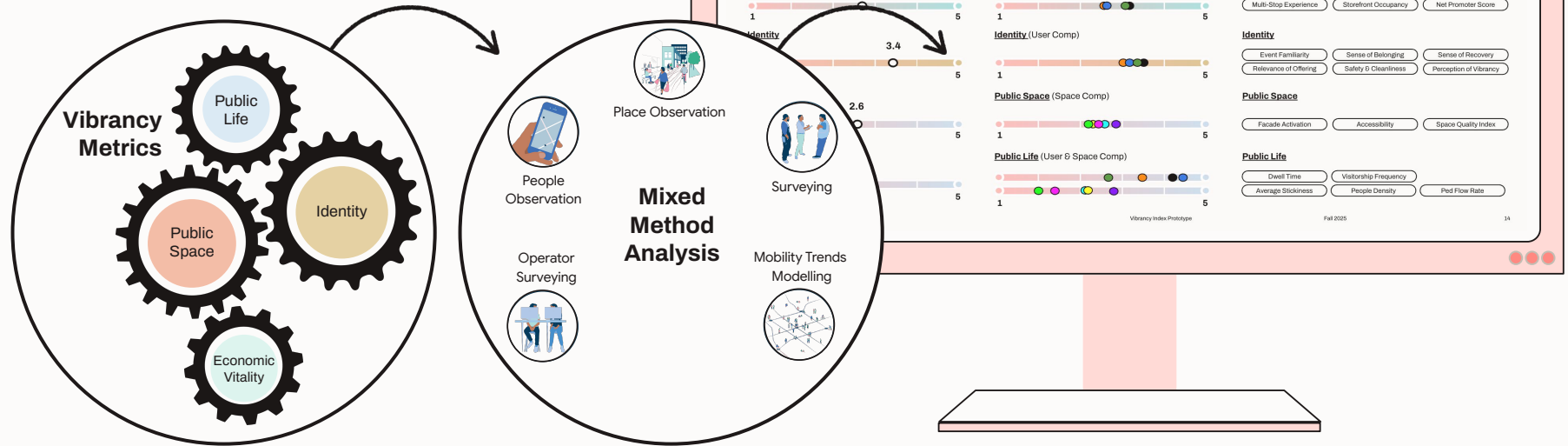
Index Overview

Metrics and Pilot Assessment

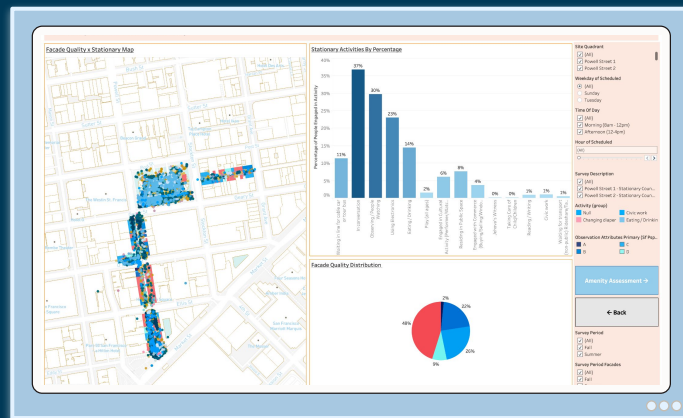
Building on our definition, and insights from our research and early conversations, we sketched out an initial **vibrancy assessment framework**.



Our process involves leveraging a **mixed-method approach** to assess metrics **over time**, and indexing them in an **interactive digital dashboard**.



The **raw data** from our Union Square case study is housed in a Tableau dashboard. **This is not the Vibrancy Index dashboard and does not feature any indexed metrics.**



The purpose of the Union Square pilot

Develop a Replicable Methodology

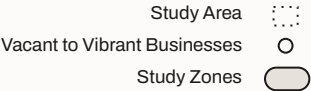
Create a transparent and adaptable framework for urban vibrancy assessment, applicable across San Francisco and the US.

Stress-Test a Theoretical Framework

Evaluate our understanding of vibrancy through public life, public space, economic vitality, and cultural identity in a real-world setting.

Guide Interventions

Use data collection to provide both a "health check" and actionable guidance for targeted urban revitalization efforts.



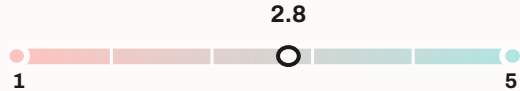
Union Square

Composite Score



Metric Category Scores

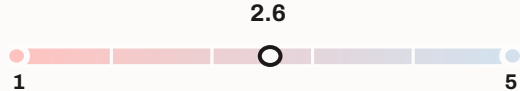
Economic Vitality



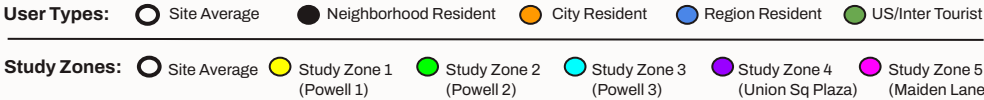
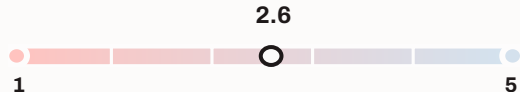
Identity



Public Space



Public Life



User & Study Zone Comparison

Economic Vitality (User Comp)



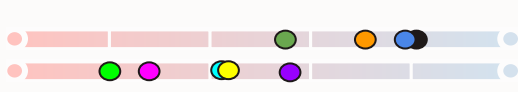
Identity (User Comp)



Public Space (Space Comp)

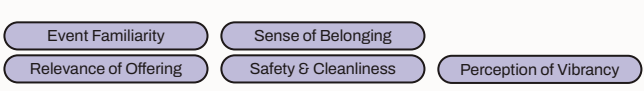


Public Life (User & Space Comp)

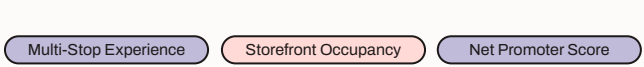


Index Metrics

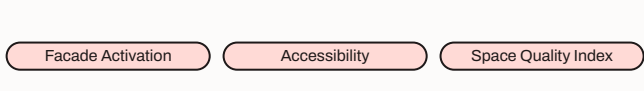
Identity



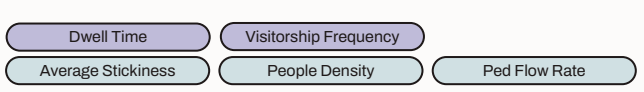
Economic Vitality



Public Space



Public Life



Union Square

Composite Score

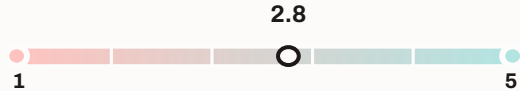


← COMPOSITE SCORE

Averaged score for the site across all metric categories from 1 (Low) to 5 (high).

Metric Category Scores

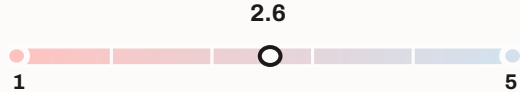
Economic Vitality



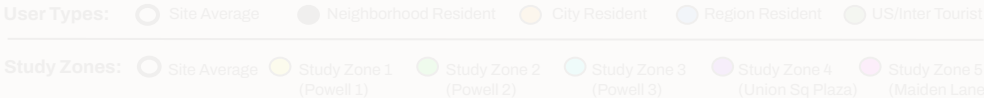
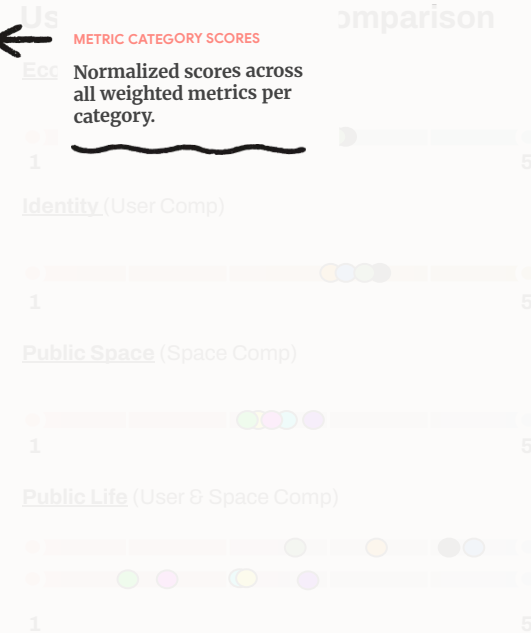
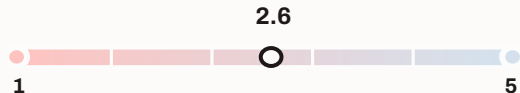
Identity



Public Space



Public Life

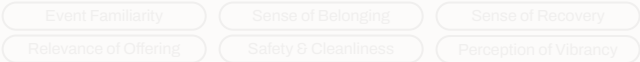


Index Metrics

Economic Vitality



Identity



Public Space



Public Life



Union Squa

Composite Score

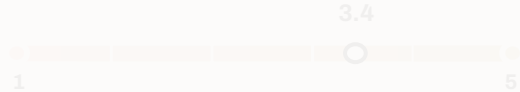


Metric Category

Economic Vitality



Identity



Public Space



Public Life



USER & STUDY ZONE LEGEND

Click on the user type or study zone to filter.



User Types: ○ Site Average ● Neighborhood Resident ● City Resident ● Region Resident ● US/Inter Tourist

Study Zones: ○ Site Average ● Study Zone 1 (Powell 1) ● Study Zone 2 (Powell 2) ● Study Zone 3 (Powell 3) ● Study Zone 4 (Union Sq Plaza) ● Study Zone 5 (Maiden Lane)



User & Study Zone Comparison

Economic Vitality (User Comp)



Identity (User Comp)



Public Space (Space Comp)



Public Life (User & Space Comp)

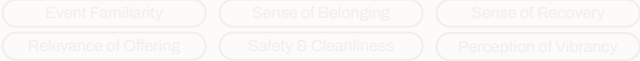


Index Metrics

Economic Vitality



Identity



Public Space



Public Life



Union Square

Composite Score

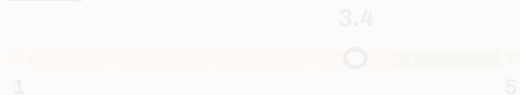


Metric Category Scores

Economic Vitality



Identity



Public Space

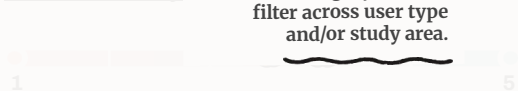


Public Life

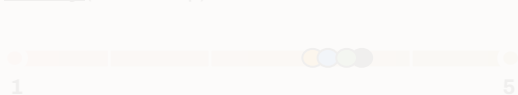


User & Study

Economic Vitality



Identity (User Comp)



Public Space (Space Comp)



Public Life (User & Space Comp)



User Types: ☐ Site Average ☒ Neighborhood Resident ☐ City Resident ☐ Region Resident ☐ US/Inter Tourist

Study Zones: ☐ Site Average ☐ Study Zone 1 (Powell 1) ☐ Study Zone 2 (Powell 2) ☐ Study Zone 3 (Powell 3) ☐ Study Zone 4 (Union Sq Plaza) ☐ Study Zone 5 (Malden Lane)

INDEX METRICS

List of associated metrics for each category. Click to filter across user type and/or study area.

Index Metrics

Economic Vitality

Multi-Stop Experience Storefront Occupancy Net Promoter Score

Identity

Event Familiarity Sense of Belonging
Relevance of Offering Safety & Cleanliness Perception of Vibrancy

Public Space

Facade Activation Accessibility Space Quality Index

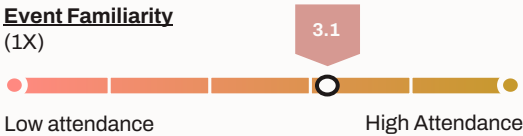
Public Life

Dwell Time Visitorship Frequency
Average Stickiness People Density Ped Flow Rate

Identity | Index Score: 3.3

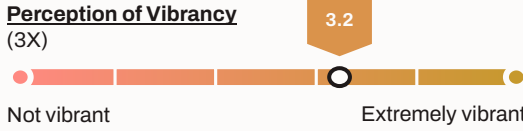
Indexed Metrics ▼

Event Familiarity (1X)



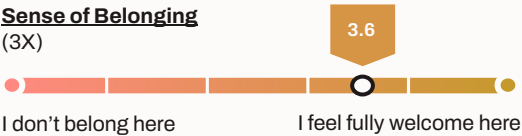
The **Event Familiarity** score represents the percentage of respondents who have previously attended an event within the study site. This measure reflects the level of engagement that an area successfully attracts, critical in understanding vibrancy.

Perception of Vibrancy (3X)



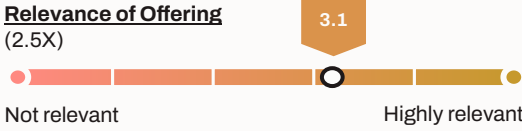
This measure gauges people's **perception of the site's vibrancy**. It is accompanied by a question designed to identify factors individuals believe contribute to vibrancy. These insights are crucial for guiding future investments, adjusting current programs, or informing public space design.

Sense of Belonging (3X)



A robust **sense of belonging** signals a strong emotional bond with a place, highlighting its inclusivity and accessibility. This bond is furthered when people's needs are understood, and individuals are empowered to take part in public life, fostering deeper engagement with the place.

Relevance of Offering (2.5X)



The **Relevance of Offering** metric assesses how well retail, amenities, and programs within the study site align with respondents' needs. A secondary question designed to pinpoint missing elements helps provide actionable recommendations for site enhancement.

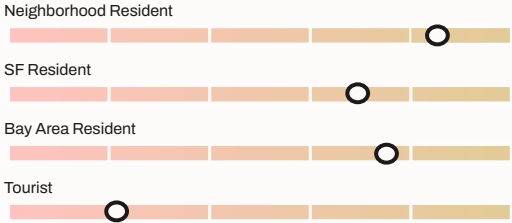
Perception of Safety & Cleanliness (3X)



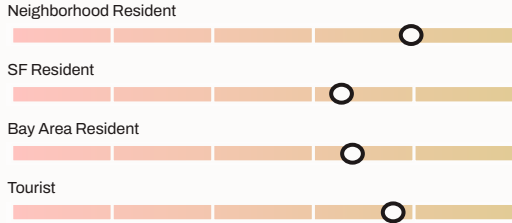
This composite metric helps put in perspective two critical aspects of a site's attractiveness: **safety and cleanliness**. While inherently different depending on the lived experience of the user, it gives a pulse on how respondents feel about the general health of the area, an important proxy to understanding vibrancy.

Identity | User Comparison

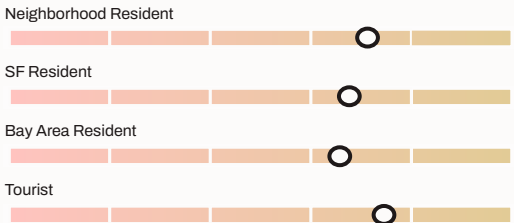
Event Familiarity (1X)



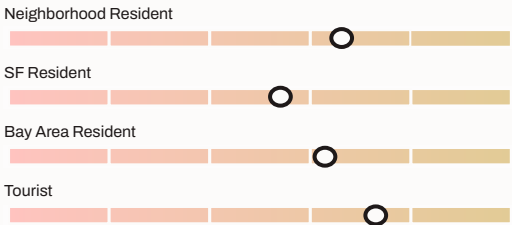
Sense of Belonging (3X)



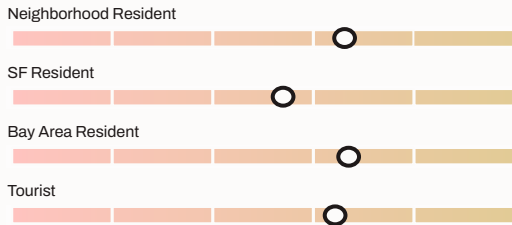
Perception of Safety & Cleanliness (3X)



Perception of Vibrancy (3X)



Relevance of Offering (2.5X)



Economic Vitality

Index Score: 2.8

Context Data

\$79,619

Average monthly sales across food + bev

\$11,712

Average monthly sales across retail/merchandise

\$\$\$ (3.42/5)

Average Price Point across all businesses surveyed.

38%

Independent Operators across all businesses surveyed.

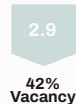
Index Metrics



Storefront Occupancy

(3X)

100% Vacancy



100% Occupancy

Storefront Vacancy measures the total percentage of storefront vacancy across the study site, normalized out of five. High vacancy indicates decline, reduced foot traffic, and low engagement, harming neighborhood vibrancy and safety. Conversely, high occupancy is often suggestive a successful retail environment and active public realm.

Net Promoter Score

(2X)

Unlikely



Very Likely

Net Promoter Score asks visitors the extent to which they would recommend the area and its retail offerings to a friend. This metric is a key indicator of visitor satisfaction and loyalty, and had a strong correlation with respondents' perception of vibrancy.

Methodology

User/Zone Comparison

Site Comparison

Overview



Multi-Stop Experience

2 Stops

(2.5X)

Assessing whether visitors make **single or multiple stops** is crucial for understanding vibrancy. A high incidence of single-stop visits suggests the area may lack diverse attractions or compelling reasons to linger, leading to a superficial engagement. Conversely, multiple stops indicate that the area offers a rich and varied experience, encouraging longer stays and deeper immersion.

Economic Vitality User Comparison

Context Data

\$79,619

Average monthly sales across food + bev

\$11,712

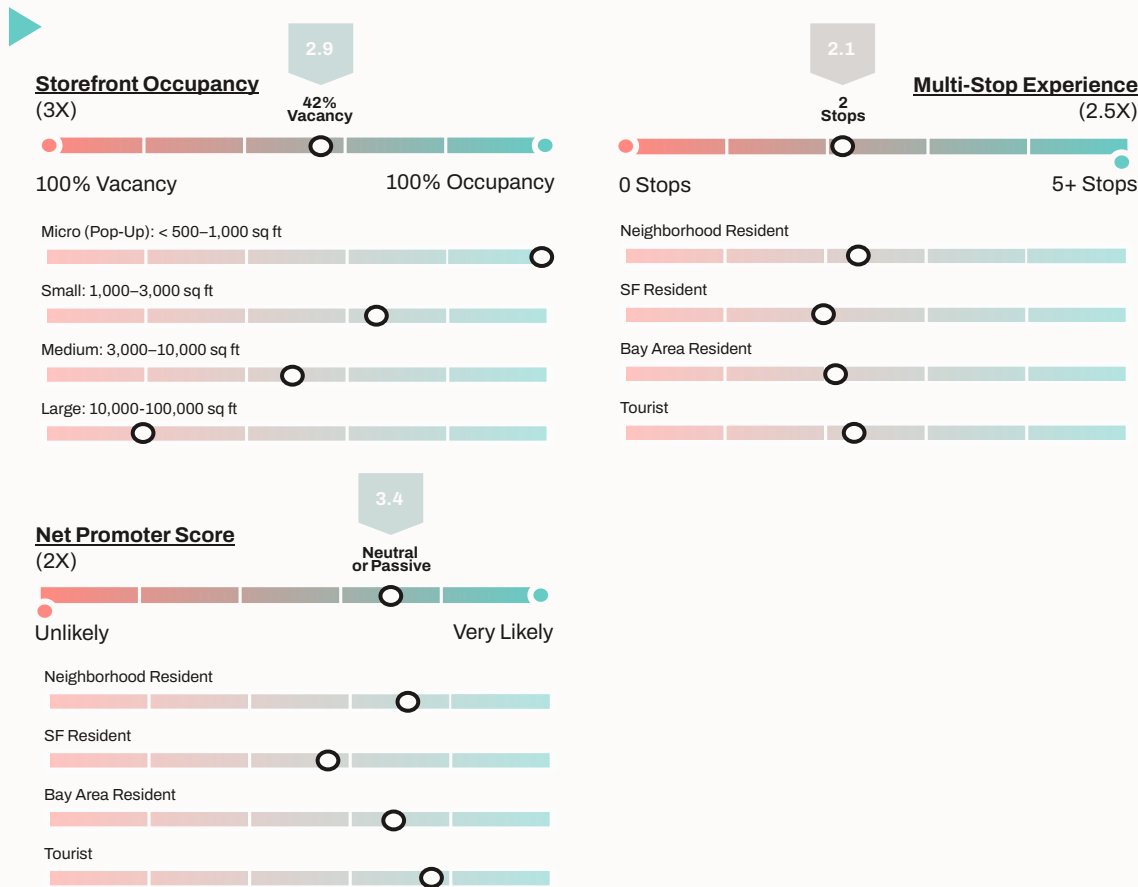
Average monthly sales across retail/merchandise

\$\$\$ (3.42/5)

Average Price Point across all businesses surveyed.

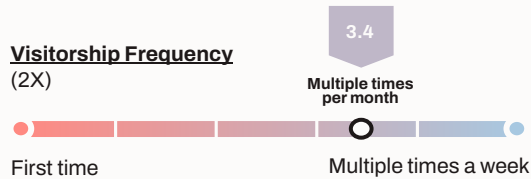
Retail Price Point Distribution		Self-Reported Visitor Expenditure	
9%	\$	12%	\$
21%	\$	40%	\$
29%	\$	40%	\$
12%	\$	8%	\$
32%	\$	0%	\$

Index Metrics

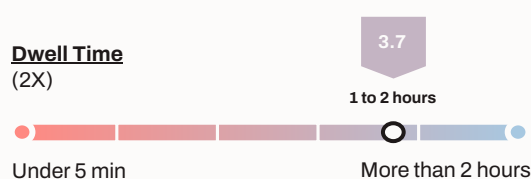


Public Life | Index Score: 2.6

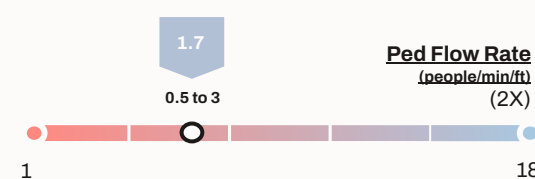
Indexed Metrics ▼



Visitorship Frequency gauges how often people visit a site, indicating whether it's a one-time stop or a regular destination. Understanding visitorship frequency is crucial for gauging vibrancy because it distinguishes between fleeting interest and sustained engagement. A vibrant space is one that people repeatedly choose to visit.



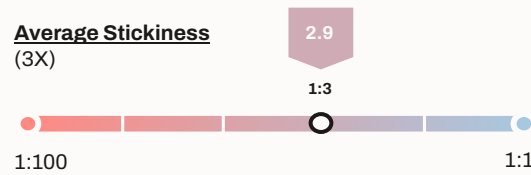
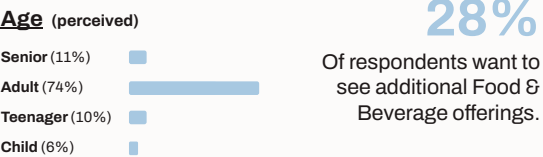
Dwell time looks to unearth how long people are spending on site when they visit. This metric is essential in understanding not only whether people are coming to a particular site, but whether they are choosing to stay and for how long.



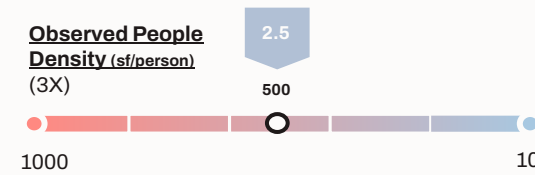
Pedestrian flow rate is the number of pedestrians passing a specific point or cross-section over a set unit of time. It is a key measure in transportation and urban planning, used to quantify pedestrian movement and analyze the quality of service on walkways and other facilities. We only apply this metric to streets.

Context Data ▼

123



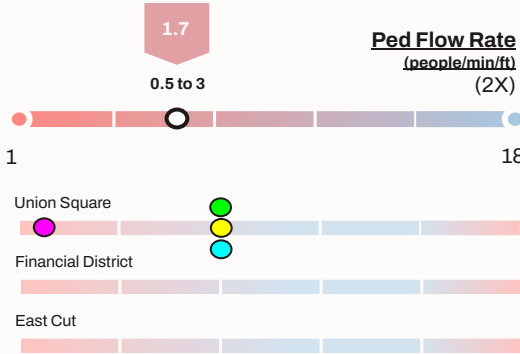
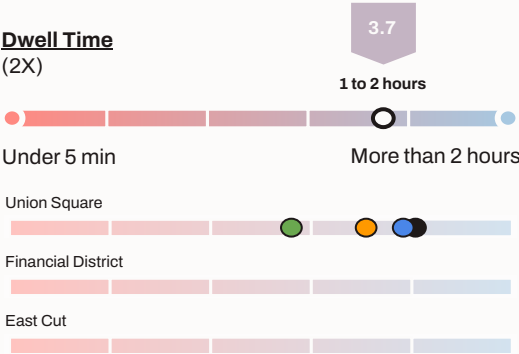
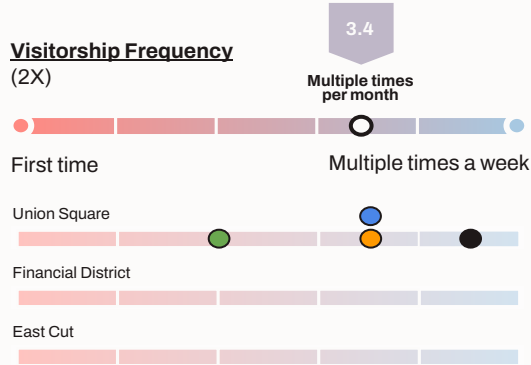
Stickiness gauges the average proportion of individuals who are stationary in a place compared to those who simply pass through at a particular time of day. It indicates how effectively a location encourages lingering and staying, rather than just movement, and serves as a strong indicator of vibrancy.



Observed people density reflects the typical amount of people present in a given area under study. This captures how intensely people are using the space, a key driver of vibrant urban environments. It is presented here as an average measured across the entirety of the study period.

Public Life | User & Study Zone Comparison

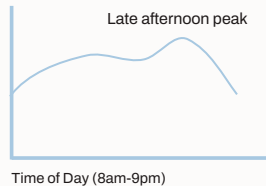
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Context Data

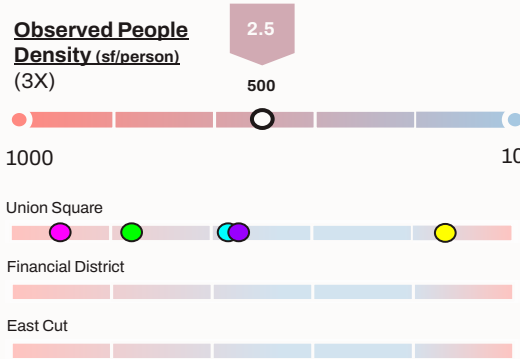
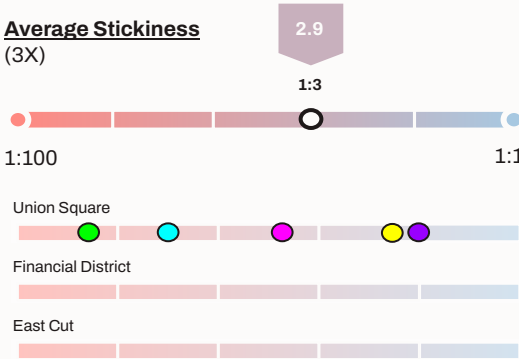
123

Ped Throughflow (Streets)



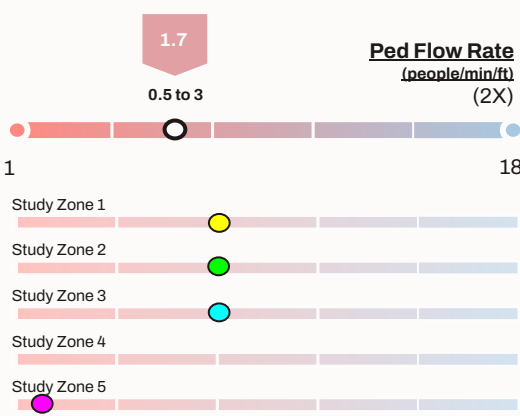
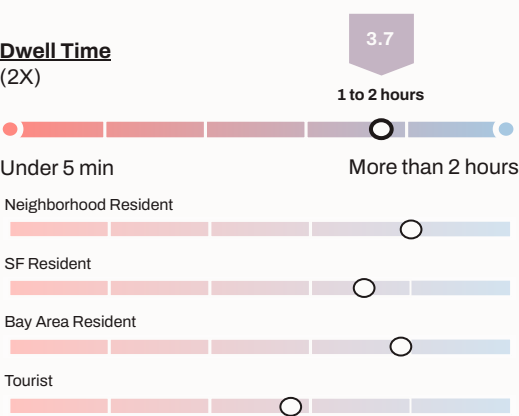
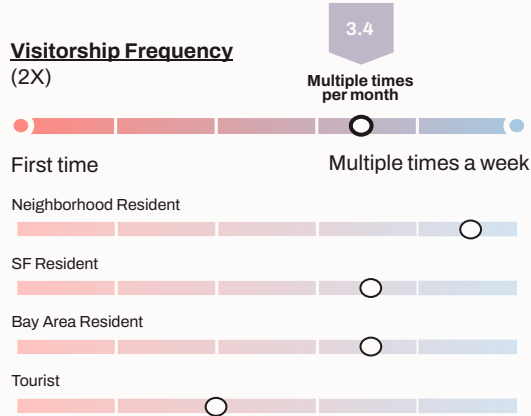
Movement

883
Average Hourly People Movement
Count across all study zones
and study times



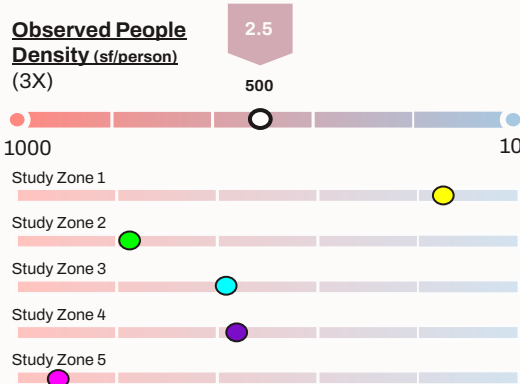
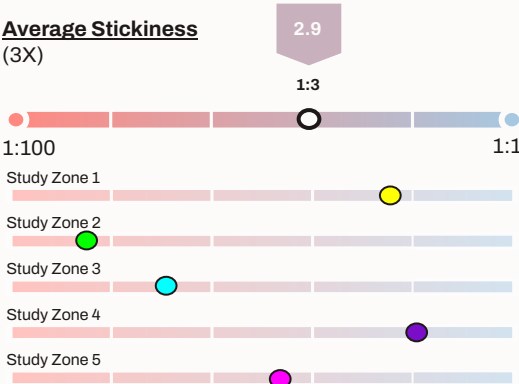
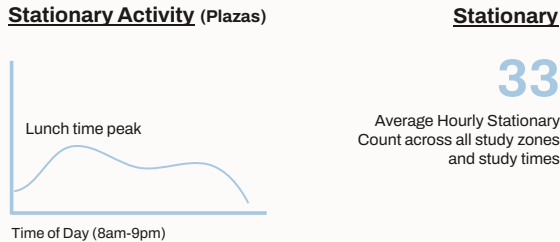
Public Life | User & Study Zone Comparison

Study Zones: Site Average Study Zone 1 (Powell 1) Study Zone 2 (Powell 2) Study Zone 3 (Powell 3) Study Zone 4 (Union Sq Plaza) Study Zone 5 (Maiden Lane)



Context Data

123



Public Space

Index Score: 2.6

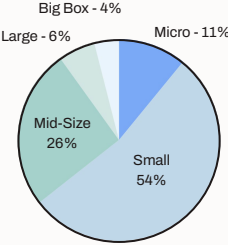
Context Data

▼

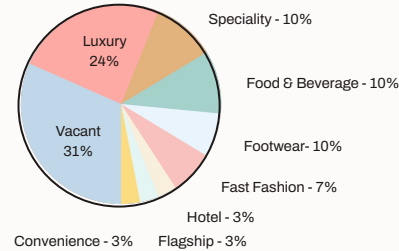
1

2

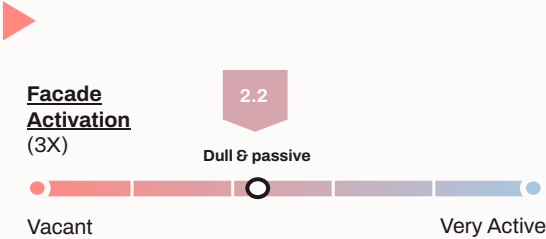
Storefront Size



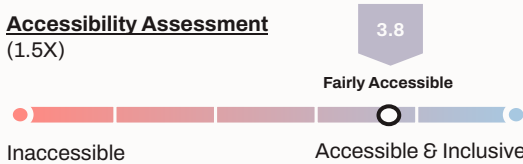
Retail Type Distribution



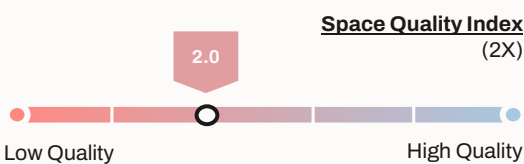
Index Metrics



The **Facade Activation Score** assesses the visual impact of facades and storefronts within the study area. This metric, which ranges from inactive/vacant to very active, offers insights into a crucial aspect influencing the public's perception of vibrancy of a place.



The **Accessibility Assessment** focuses on Physical Accessibility and Wayfinding. Physical Accessibility evaluates paths (evenness, demarcation, width), obstacles, ramps, and lighting. Wayfinding assesses if it's intuitive and inclusive, and if signage is clear, legible, tactile, and uses icons for diverse users.



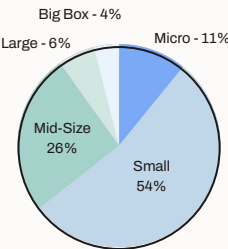
The **Space Quality Index** is a composite assessment of various aspects of public spaces, including **protection** (sensory, traffic, and crime), **comfort** (sitting, views, and communication), and **enjoyment** (scale and aesthetics). Each of these criteria contributes to an overall Quality - Composite Score.

Public Space

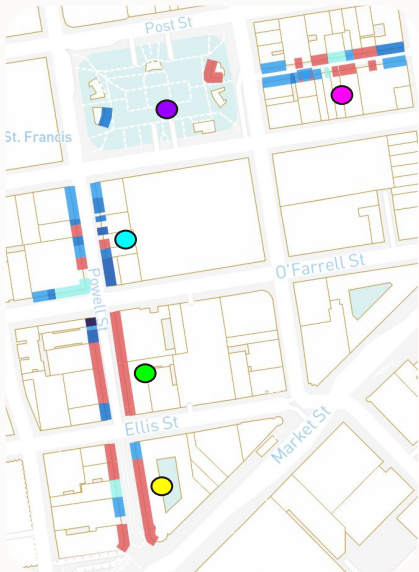
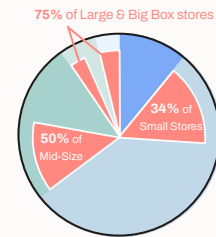
Study Zone Comparison

Context Data

Storefront Size



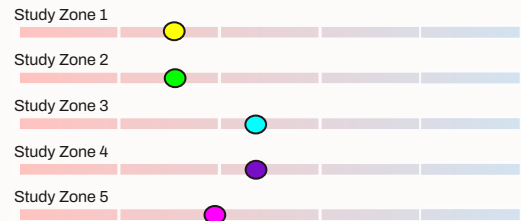
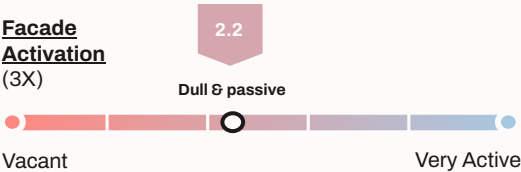
Vacancy



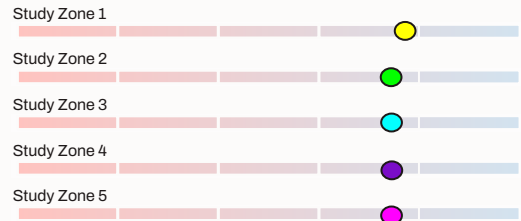
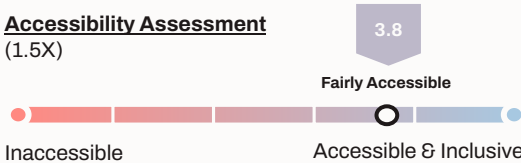
Index Metrics

Study Zones: Site Average Study Zone 1 (Powell 1) Study Zone 2 (Powell 2) Study Zone 3 (Powell 3) Study Zone 4 (Union Sq Plaza) Study Zone 5 (Maiden Lane)

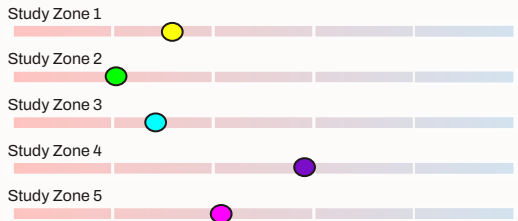
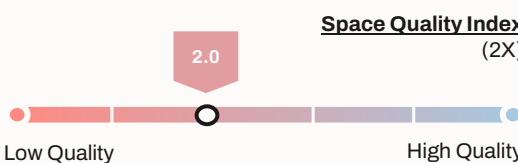
Facade Activation (3X)



Accessibility Assessment (1.5X)



Space Quality Index (2X)



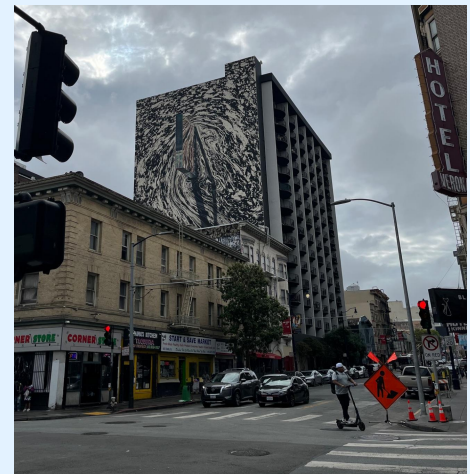


Next Steps

Opportunities

Implementing in 5 neighborhoods

With support from the **Pisces Foundation**, we have funding to stress-test the Vibrancy Index in 5 neighborhoods over the next year.





Pilot setup

The steps

Setting up a Vibrancy Index pilot

Define study zone

Determine the block or couple of blocks to focus on.

Partner prepares spatial analysis components.

Determine survey questions

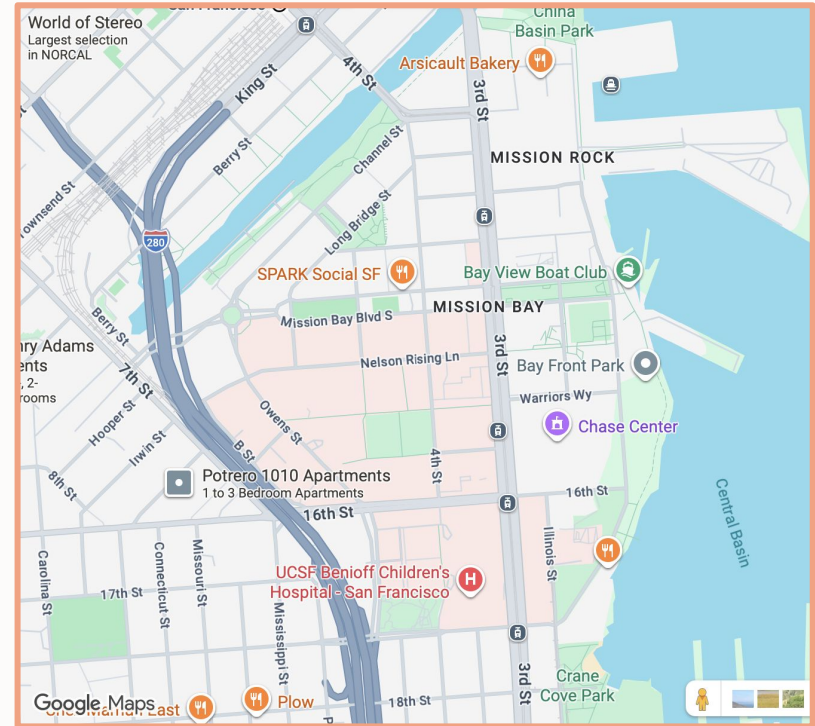
Select from pre-existing set and/or decide on additional questions to include.

Decide metric weighting

Vibrancy is context specific, decide which metrics are more important and assign weighting.

Develop engagement plan

Active engagement is involved in collecting business data, surveying the community, and observing how people interact in the study area.



Implementation Engagement Timeline

Week 1: Kickoff meeting

Everyone involved convenes to align on roles, responsibilities, timelines.

Week 2: Data Environment Setup

SFND/Gehl/Stamen creates project and data environment

Week 3: Training Workshop + Desktop Research

3 hours of training for data collection. (Surveying, Public Life, Public Space, context data)
Desktop research begins: Lists ground floor address within site area, logging amenity type, retail type, business name, vacant/occupied, days and hours of operation (context data), independent owner (desktop research) Store square footage estimations what's open to public linear square feet of frontage (laser pointer), retail price point distribution

Week 4:

Surveying people on the street
Public life observation (x2 days, 13 hours across shifts)

Week 5+6:

Online surveying
Data cleanup

Week 7:

Data aggregation
Data visualization

Week 8:

Sharing and socializing with partners

Data Collection

Desktop Research

Make list of groundfloor addresses within site area
Log amenity type
Log retail types
Retail price point distribution
Context data: Days + hours of operation, independent ownership, what's open to the public

Public Space Observation

Accessibility
Facade Quality
Square footage

Public Life

2x observation days in person.per observable block.
4 hour time chunks (13 hours of observation per each day)
1 weekday, 1 weekend day
Looking at stationary activity and counting movement, observing age range and gender

Operator Engagement

Context data
Monthly sales/business health

Thank you