

A hand is shown placing a small gold object into a colorful miniature city model. The model features various structures, including a blue and white striped tower, a green cube, and a red and white striped wall. The background is filled with vibrant colors and textures, suggesting a creative and imaginative environment.

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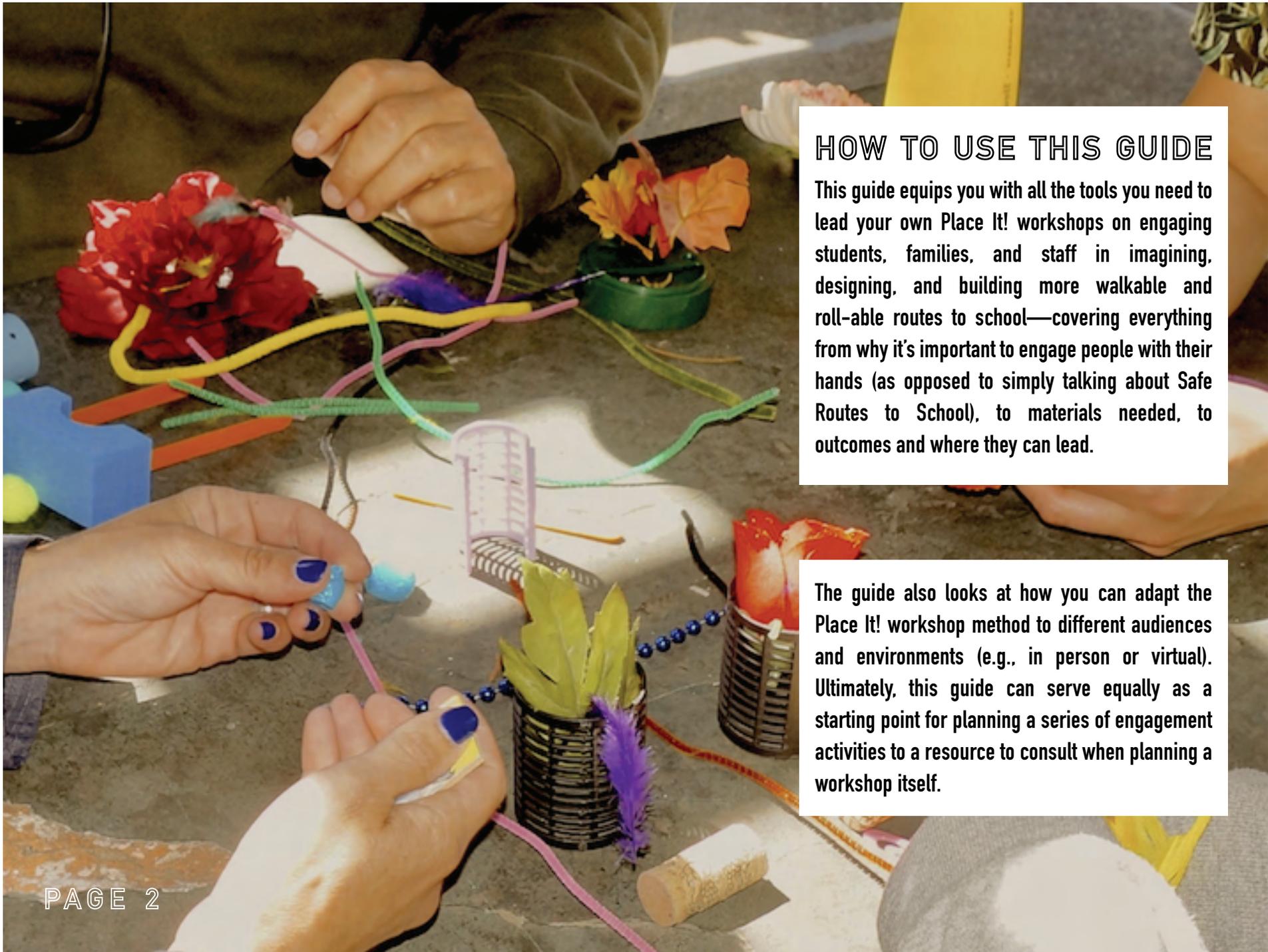
PLACE IT!

GUIDE TO

SAFE ROUTES TO

SCHOOL

How to engage students, families, and staff of all backgrounds in imagining, designing, and building more walkable and roll-able routes to school



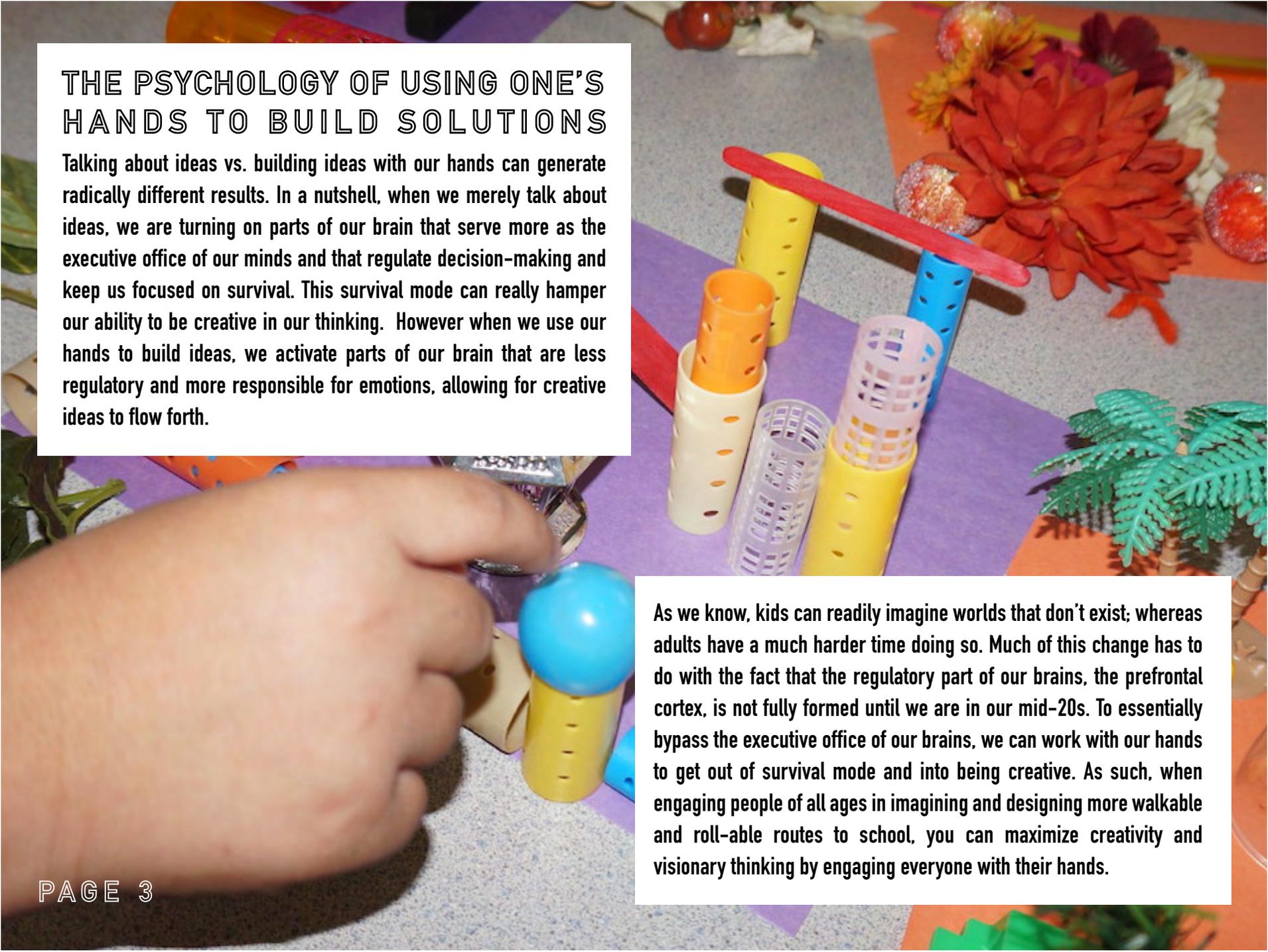
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide equips you with all the tools you need to lead your own Place It! workshops on engaging students, families, and staff in imagining, designing, and building more walkable and roll-able routes to school—covering everything from why it's important to engage people with their hands (as opposed to simply talking about Safe Routes to School), to materials needed, to outcomes and where they can lead.

The guide also looks at how you can adapt the Place It! workshop method to different audiences and environments (e.g., in person or virtual). Ultimately, this guide can serve equally as a starting point for planning a series of engagement activities to a resource to consult when planning a workshop itself.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF USING ONE'S HANDS TO BUILD SOLUTIONS

Talking about ideas vs. building ideas with our hands can generate radically different results. In a nutshell, when we merely talk about ideas, we are turning on parts of our brain that serve more as the executive office of our minds and that regulate decision-making and keep us focused on survival. This survival mode can really hamper our ability to be creative in our thinking. However when we use our hands to build ideas, we activate parts of our brain that are less regulatory and more responsible for emotions, allowing for creative ideas to flow forth.

A hand is shown in the foreground, assembling a colorful structure from plastic cups and sticks. The structure consists of several stacked plastic cups in various colors (yellow, orange, white, blue) with holes, and a red stick is placed horizontally across the top. The background shows a table with various craft supplies, including a large orange flower, a green fern, and other colorful objects. The scene is brightly lit, and the colors are vibrant.

As we know, kids can readily imagine worlds that don't exist; whereas adults have a much harder time doing so. Much of this change has to do with the fact that the regulatory part of our brains, the prefrontal cortex, is not fully formed until we are in our mid-20s. To essentially bypass the executive office of our brains, we can work with our hands to get out of survival mode and into being creative. As such, when engaging people of all ages in imagining and designing more walkable and roll-able routes to school, you can maximize creativity and visionary thinking by engaging everyone with their hands.

A group of people, including a man in a blue shirt and cap and several women, are gathered around a table outdoors. They are engaged in a workshop activity, creating colorful paper flowers. The table is covered with various materials like paper, scissors, and glue. The background shows a paved area and some greenery. The overall atmosphere is collaborative and creative.

THE PLACE IT! WORKSHOP METHOD

Grounded in the knowledge that we can be at our creative best when we are using our hands, the Place It! workshop method is, at the core, a set of simple model-building exercises, whereby participants use an array of found objects to build both memories of place and places they would love to see in the future. Yet unlike conventional model-building activities, there is no emphasis placed on perfect scale or creating exact replicas of the world around us. In this way, no one has to have previous design experience, and everyone can participate.



Since the Place It! method is an approach in which expectations of perfection are removed (i.e., perfect models, perfect speech), participants can feel much more comfortable sharing and building their ideas. Along with that comfort comes a willingness to engage in collective play, which ultimately translates into collaboration. In this way, considerations of equity are tacitly and intrinsically woven into the medium and the outcomes, as folks who might otherwise be left out of more traditional engagement methods are welcomed and comfortable participating. Additionally, ideas that participants might have trouble expressing through language alone can come to the fore, as folks are using a medium of engagement almost all of us feel comfortable with: our hands. In fact, as children, we explore the world first and foremost through our hands and senses and not through language, so it makes sense that this medium readily takes us to a place of comfort and familiarity.

MATERIALS NEEDED

If conducting the workshops in person, you will need letter-sized colored construction paper, one sheet of which will need to be placed in front of every chair at each table prior to participants arriving. These will serve as the bases for each participant's model and for the larger models for the second half of the workshop. Next, provide as many found objects as you can assemble together atop a table in one central location that everyone can access. These objects might include but aren't limited to hair rollers, popsicle sticks, fake leaves, trinkets, figurines, and pipe cleaners. In fact, it is better to use objects that are not immediately recognizable as typical elements of a physical place (e.g. small buildings) and instead use objects that could be used to represent a variety of elements within a built and emotional landscape. For example, hair rollers could represent buildings, but they could equally represent a memory of spending time with one's grandmother while she styled her hair. In essence, the choice of objects should allow for maximum flexibility of interpretation and creativity.

If conducting the workshops online, participants will use objects that they have lying around their homes: plants, pens, pencils, silverware, books—anything they would like to use and that is accessible. They don't need to use construction paper as a base but can instead use a book or table or simply build their model on the floor.



W O R K S H O P V E N U E

It is preferable to have participants gather in a space in which there are multiple smaller tables that seat four to six people comfortably. One table can then be set aside for the found objects and materials participants will use for their models. Having people stationed at smaller tables makes both the individual and team-based model-building exercises of the workshop easy to do, and this allows for easy collaboration and conversation among the entire group and within smaller teams at the tables. Visible to all participants should also be a white board or flipchart, which the designated recorder can then write everyone's ideas on. Online workshops can easily be conducted over Zoom. See Page 13 for sample online format and useful tips.





WORKSHOP FORMAT

The workshop format is short and simple, allowing participants to quickly sink into a state of play, build, and let their imaginations run free. It also generates meaningful ideas and outcomes for more walkable and rollable routes to school.

The core of the workshop consists of two model-building exercises and a presenting and reflection activity after each building exercise. A simple breakdown goes as follows:

5 Minutes	—————	Introduction to workshop
10 Minutes	—————	Model-Building Exercise 1
10 Minutes	—————	Report back, discuss themes
10 Minutes	—————	Model-Building Exercise 2
10 Minutes	—————	Report back, discuss themes
10 Minutes	—————	Take-aways and next steps



P R O M P T
ONE always centers on building a memory. In the case of Safe Routes to School, we like to have the first prompt be “Build your first memory of a mobility experience” (typically used for older students and adults), or, if the workshop is with younger students, “Build a memory of walking or rolling (e.g., biking, skating, skateboarding, etc.) in your neighborhood.” But you can easily come up with your own!

After taking 10 minutes to build, each participant gets to share their model with the entire group and tell everyone about their memory. A designated recorder can write down the person’s name and a summary of their memory on a white board or flipchart. After everyone has shared, invite participants to reflect on what the recurring themes were amongst the models. For groups that are not too large (or too wild!), you can have everyone stand up and gather around each model as it is presented, so that everyone can get an up-close look at the memory. So as to keep the exercise uplifting and validating, you can follow every mini-presentation with a “Let’s hear it for + summary of the model,” and then everyone typically claps.



WHY START WITH A M E M O R Y ?

Starting with a memory for the first model-building exercise is key, as when we mine our best memories, we are tapping into times when we first felt we belonged, places where we felt safe, into moments of joy and freedom and comfort. The effect of both reflecting on that memory and then building it serves to remind ourselves of what our core values are. We not only reaffirm these values to ourselves through the exercise—and even reconnect with these values (which oftentimes get lost in the shuffle of the day-to-day realities of just surviving in the world)—but in the process of reporting back to the group on what we have built, we also learn about what others value and, more often than not, how similar we all are.



PROMPT TWO always centers on creating an ideal place. In the case of Safe Routes to School, we typically like to give participants the prompt of “Build your ideal walking or rolling route to school.” Other possible prompts could be “Build your ideal street,” or “Build your ideal neighborhood.” For younger participants, you can always modify the prompt to be more playful, such as in “Build an awesome street for biking and walking.”

If leading the workshop in person, this second model-building exercise is always team-based (i.e., groups of typically no more than five). The idea is for participants to bring their memories and ideas together to build something larger and to collaborate in the process. To create a larger base on which to build, participants can take their construction paper sheets from the first exercise and push them together.



In the same way as in the first model-building exercise, participants should be given around 10 minutes to build. Afterwards, each group should have about a minute to present their model. If possible, it is ideal to be able to have everyone get up and gather around each model as it is presented. Once each has been presented, participants should be led through a reflection activity in which they pull out not just recurring themes of the models but also look at how some of elements of their favorite memories might have turned up in their models of ideal places. For closure and if time permits, you might want to think about leaving participants with a parting thought or question they can take with them: "Do you think this exercise might change how you see and understand your trip to school? If so, how?" While participants might not readily have answers to these questions, they can help attune them to what to look for and reflect on once the workshop has come to a close.

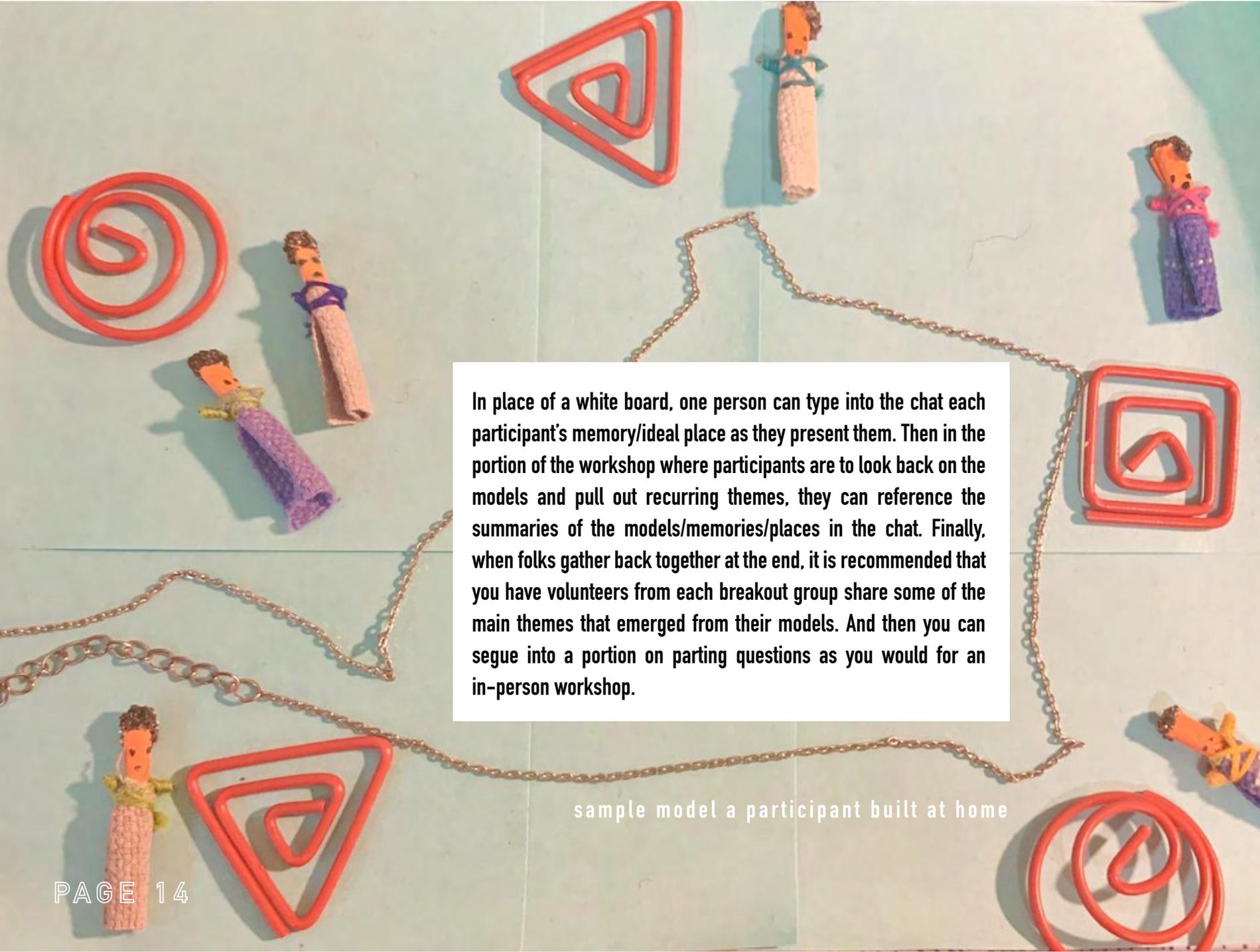
CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP ONLINE

The workshop can readily be translated to an online format. The agenda can be almost identical to the in-person workshop; however, it is recommended that you create break-out rooms for the model-building portions of the exercise for groups larger than 10. In this way, the agenda would look as follows:

5	Minutes	—————	Intro to workshop (conducted in the main room)
10	Minutes	—————	Model-building Exercise 1 (led in breakout rooms)
10	Minutes	—————	Report back, discuss themes (led in breakout rooms)
10	Minutes	—————	Model-building Exercise 2 (led in breakout rooms)
10	Minutes	—————	Report back, discuss themes. (led in breakout rooms)
10	Minutes	—	Take-aways and next steps (conducted back in the main room)

For the second model-building exercise—what is typically a team-based exercise—students can work on their models individually, or, if their families are part of the workshop, families can work all together to build an ideal place.

sample model a participant built at home



In place of a white board, one person can type into the chat each participant's memory/ideal place as they present them. Then in the portion of the workshop where participants are to look back on the models and pull out recurring themes, they can reference the summaries of the models/memories/places in the chat. Finally, when folks gather back together at the end, it is recommended that you have volunteers from each breakout group share some of the main themes that emerged from their models. And then you can segue into a portion on parting questions as you would for an in-person workshop.

sample model a participant built at home

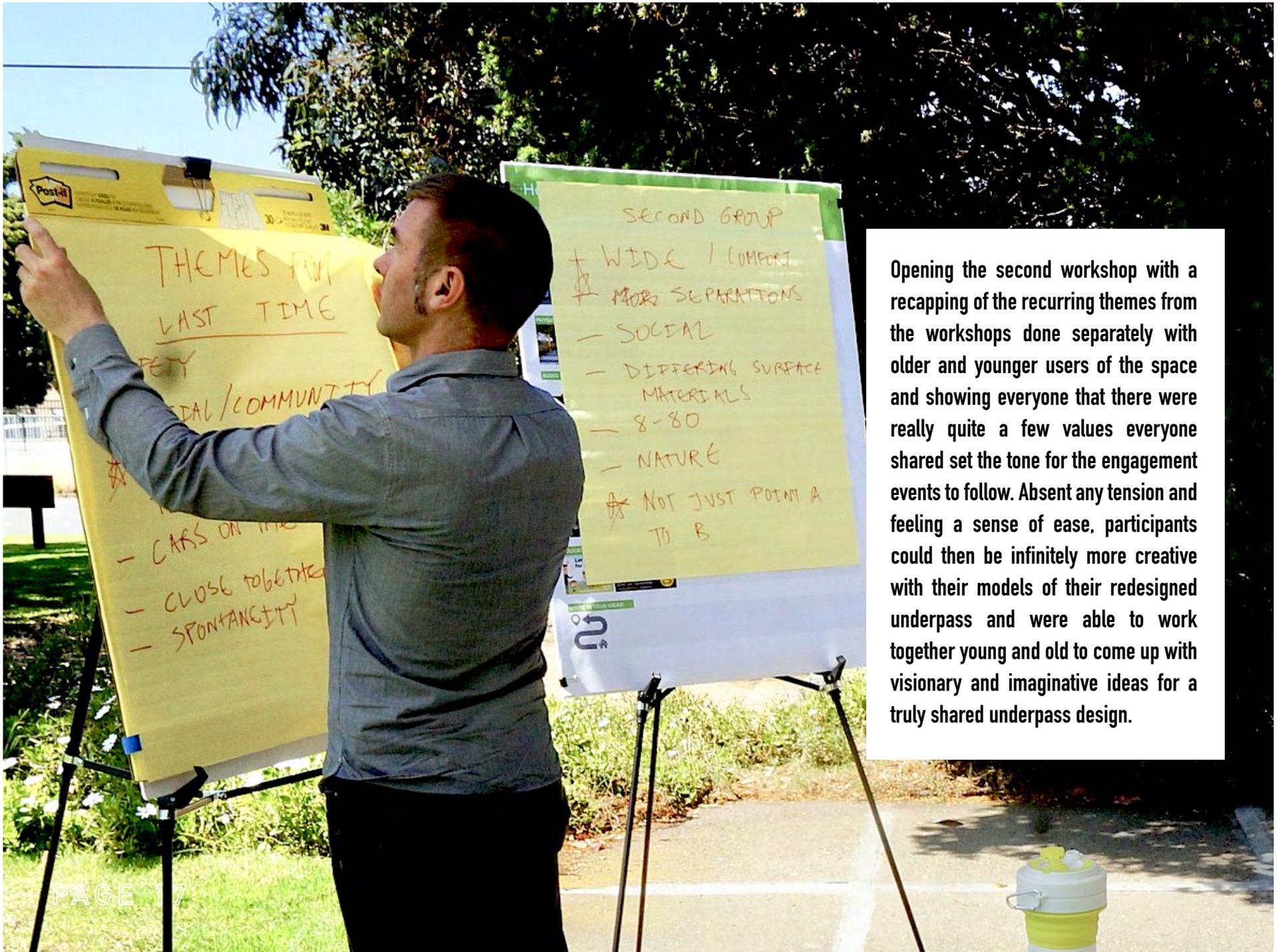


O U T C O M E S

A range of meaningful and valuable outcomes—some tangible and some less tangible—can be generated through the Place It! workshop. Themes that emerge can serve as guiding principles for further engagement events and for guiding the evolution of actual physical redesigns of streets and sidewalks. Elements of the models of the ideal walks/rolls to school can also inform actual physical redesigns of streets and sidewalks. However, intangible outcomes can also emerge and be just as valuable. These include a greater sense of one's own design and planning capacity, a change in how we see our urban surroundings, and a heightened understanding of how the built and natural environments can influence how we feel as we walk or roll in our neighborhoods, cities, and to and from school. More often than not, both intangible and tangible outcomes will emerge from these workshops



For example, in our work on a shared bike/pedestrian space in Palo Alto, we were tackling two challenges simultaneously: a bike/ped underpass that simply didn't work in its current design, and conflicts between those biking and those walking within the space. As such, we wanted our outcomes to address both the physical design of the space and people's attitudes towards and perceptions of one another. By leading older residents and younger residents through separate workshops first and away from the underpass itself, and then bringing them together for a second workshop on-site, we were able to diffuse a lot of the tension between these user groups.



Opening the second workshop with a recapping of the recurring themes from the workshops done separately with older and younger users of the space and showing everyone that there were really quite a few values everyone shared set the tone for the engagement events to follow. Absent any tension and feeling a sense of ease, participants could then be infinitely more creative with their models of their redesigned underpass and were able to work together young and old to come up with visionary and imaginative ideas for a truly shared underpass design.



While not all outcomes can be anticipated, it is important to see the Place It! workshop as part of a broader engagement strategy and to set some hoped-for outcomes at the get-go. In this way, you can then craft model-building prompts to be in line with the outcomes you are looking for and also craft further engagement events that can build off of the model-building workshop.

RICH, BETH

WIDE, NATURE IN MIDDLE,
PAVED LANE FOR FAST BIKES

Documenting outcomes can be done in simple and more complex ways. The simplest is through photos, and then a recording of all of the core elements of the models and themes. These can then be translated into a simple write-up accompanied by visuals. If, say, moving toward more formal design proposals is part of the overall scope, we recommend using the themes as guiding principles from start to finish of the design process. Core elements of the memories and ideal places can be categorized into types of spaces and places (e.g., hang-out, comfort, cozy, exciting, nature-filled) so that you can work these kinds of spaces and places into the design without having to be too literal with working in each and every idea and component. In this way, participants can still see their ideas and designs in the final product even if it doesn't embody a literal recreation of each and every component.

DIVIDED UP BY SPEEDS
AREA WHERE PEOPLE CAN PASS,
BIKING W/ 4-YR-OLD
WOULD TAKE FRIENDS! HERE,
PURPLE & ORANGE LANES,

THEMES

- WIDTH
- SEPARATION
- SPACE TO DO SOCIAL WHILE TRAVELING
- SURFACES OF DIFFERENT KINDS
- 8 TO 80
- NATURE
- NOT JUST POINT A TO POINT B
- BIKING W/O WHEELS ABOUT BIKES



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PLACE IT! WEBSITE

www.placeit.org

WATCH TRAINING

<https://bit.ly/3l25Fou>

USEFUL ARTICLES

How do you teach kids urban planning? Let them play

<https://bit.ly/3sRi0TQ>

Designers and planners take note:

People's fondest memories rarely involve technology

<https://bit.ly/3riZDSt>

PLACE IT! YOUTUBE CHANNEL

<https://bit.ly/3qDA39K>



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PLACE IT! CONTACT INFO

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PRAIRIEFORM WEBSITE

www.prairieform.com

PRAIRIEFORM YOUTUBE CHANNEL

<https://bit.ly/3rKmlDh>

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