

Part One: STRATEGY TOOLS

1. Engage the Community in the Conversation

Readers of this Toolkit are joining an intricate conversation in which not everyone is willing or able to take part. Providing basic amenities for people in public places is challenging work. It takes time and individuals with a good mix of skills, some of which you can acquire by using these tools.

Your interest in meeting unmet toilet needs makes you special. Your initiative may be motivated by any of a number of situations. Perhaps you care for a tot or an elder and arrange your outings around toilet availability. Perhaps you are the mayor of a town whose residents are up in arms about public toilet closures due to budget constraints. Perhaps you work in the visitor center for your large city and are tired of complaints from international visitors about the lack of public toilets. Perhaps you want to join the Wednesday night softball league but the distance to the nearest restroom is embarrassingly far. Perhaps you are a transportation planner who realizes that some people won't walk or take transit unless there are restrooms along the route. Perhaps you just get it.

Now you need to engage others in the conversation. In the beginning your circle may be small. It will grow larger and stronger as you embark on the fascinating multidisciplinary venture of public toilet advocacy.

Why is it so difficult to talk about public toilets?

Raise the issue of making public toilets available in an American city and you're likely to be met with giggles and toilet puns. For a variety of reasons Americans appear to be more uncomfortable talking about

this shared human need that people elsewhere. Just move slowly through it, finding the right words and letting people get comfortable with them. There is no reason to be too public with your research and advocacy until you're ready. Media professionals are likely to come knocking at your door, eager for a story. State the purpose of your initiative and promise to report back. PHLUSH learned it was a good idea not to talk to the press until we had done our homework, settled on key messages and had set a date when we would issue a report of our basic findings.

Be prepared. No matter how thoughtful a proposal is to install a new toilet, it will get at least some negative attention. It may attract ugly comments in the blogosphere as the owners of private bathrooms comment about the strangers who will use the facilities. You may face not-in-my-backyard NIMBYism from businesses and residents located near the proposed facility. Your trusted elected official is likely to be wary of taking action unless you can demonstrate that voters care about restrooms.

Public toilets have long been on the forefront of civil rights and civic action. Noting the struggles and even deaths of civil rights activists and



Although toilets meet universal needs, they are rarely part of public discourse.

transgender people seeking safe, decent restrooms, Barbara Penner writes in *Bathroom*:

*Unless we recognize the part bathrooms play in enforcing order and existing power relations, it's hard to make sense of why they are often such bitterly contested spaces.... Public facilities have often been at the front line of civil rights challenges: they are places where claims for equality are made and tested - and sometimes aggressively put down.*¹

The toilet that swept across North America and was installed in any middle class home that could afford it emerged in Victorian times and was designed for “fecal denial” and class differentiation. In *Poop Culture: How America is Shaped by its Grossest National Product*, Dave Praeger writes:

*Everyone knows that everyone poops, but everyone poops using apparatuses designed to create the appearance that no one does. Our infrastructure makes invisible what our bodies make universal. A tremendous social contradiction is the result.*²

Daniel Max Gerling points out a contradiction that emerges in the same period of US history between meeting needs at home and away.

The intimate space of the home's bathroom, under the domestic watch of the female head of house and often a Judeo-Christian ethos, and the social space of the public restroom, represented by its relative anarchy, both places for

*defecation, could hardly have operated under more disparate codes of behavior.*³

George B. Davis and Frederick Dye, early advocates of public comfort stations in United States, were confronted less with naysayers than with the public's “false delicacy” that made it difficult for them. In their 1858 *Complete and Practical Treatise upon Plumbing and Sanitation* they write:

*It is acknowledged that accommodation of the kind is an absolute necessity for the natural consequences of eating and drinking, and why there should ever be false delicacy in recognizing and providing for this cannot be explained. This strange form of modesty prevails, however, with the weaker sex, as public conveniences are, as yet, more often failures, financially and practically, than a success.*⁴

By the turn of the century the technologies were understood, embraced and became increasingly larger line items in municipal budgets. Still American officials, their advisers, the press and the public were far more reluctant to discuss issues than their European counterparts. Gerling states:

*Even though periodicals and other media from mass culture proliferated rapidly in the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, Americans had an increasingly more difficult time discussing excrement openly and frankly.... Even the engineers themselves admitted that it was a bit indelicate to speak in public of anything so unclean as sewage.*⁵

¹ Barbara Penner, *Bathroom*. (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd. 2013), 22.

² Dave Praeger, *Poop Culture: How America is Shaped by its Grossest National Product*. (Los Angeles: Feral House. 2007), 52.

³ Daniel Max Gerling, *American Wasteland: A Social and Cultural History of Excrement, 1860 - 1920*, Dissertation research, (Austin: University of Texas in Austin. 2012),138, <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/ETD-UT-2012-05-5036/GERLING-DISSERTATION.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed October 12, 2015.

⁴ George B. Davis and Frederick Dye, *Complete and Practical Treatise upon Plumbing and Sanitation*. (London: E. & F. N. Spon), 1898 Quoted in Gerling, 2012,130.

⁵ Gerling, 2012. viii.

How do you start the conversation?

Sanitation has been called the silent science. It's still remarkably absent from most private and public discourse, the exception being scatological literature and toilet humor. "Flush-and-forget" operates at individual, household and societal levels.

Activists working to make public toilets available can appreciate the opportunity to start a very interesting conversation, educate peers, and rally public support we need to frame key sanitation issues.

So how do you start the conversation? First, understand the public toilet shortage. Next, find the right words to talk about it. Then, frame the discussion in ways it makes sense to your audience so you can get them on board.

What happened to public toilets?

To understand the current lack of public toilets in the United States, it is helpful to start in the period after World War II.

1940s to 1960s Mid-century America brought Eisenhower's federal highway system, Detroit's automobiles that soon filled them, and the rest stops along them. Nuclear families with cars, typically white people, moved out of central cities and created the suburbs. The increasing number of wealthier families leaving the urban core shifted the demographics of public toilet patrons. Because of a lack of management, public toilets became associated with crime and vandalism which prompted officials to shut them down. Those still living in urban areas, often already marginalized by class or race constructs, were left without anywhere to go.

1970s to 1980s Businesses such as gas stations and supermarkets started to require users to ask for a key. Department stores with once luxurious ladies' lounges gradually went out of fashion. Areas that relied on tourism continued to have toilets, but shut them down at night or during the winter. By the 1970s, 50,000 toilet stalls had been fitted with Nik-O-Loks and other locks that required a dime. Grassroot advocacy not only eliminated pay toilets in the United States but ignited demands for "potty parity", that is, equitable toilet provision for women and men. This demand resulted from dual realities: men's urinals had always been free and, given the female anatomy and clothing, women simply required more time, privacy and space.⁶

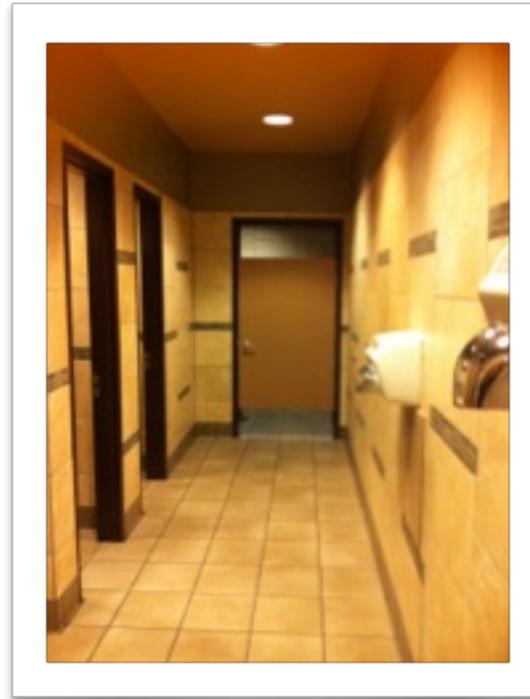
1980s to 1990s In the later part of the century, urban redevelopment brought wealthier people and funding back into city centers. Although concerned with livability and shared urban space, urban planners and architects left toilet provision to private retail establishments. Architectural training was limited to toilets in buildings, where code requirements limited creative innovations that would advance toilet design. Few design and planning professionals had experience in open space toilet provision and, since it was not part of public discourse, they ignored the issue.

1990s to 2000s Whereas the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination based on race, religion, sex, and national origin, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 goes further. It requires employers to accommodate disabled workers and mandates modifications permitting access to public places. For public toilets, this means ensuring all stall doors are wide enough and there is space in which a wheelchair-user can turn around, among other things. People who had been effectively closed out of shared public space were able to join the mainstream. The effect of the ADA on overall toilet availability is not clear, however. At the time it was passed, a typical women's restroom might include two stalls, a sink

⁶ Aaron Gordon, "Why Don't We Have Pay Toilets in America?" Pacific Standard, September 17, 2014, accessed September 23, 2015. <http://www.psmag.com/business-economics/dont-pay-toilets-america-bathroom-restroom-free-market-90683>.

and a mirror. This layout could serve four women at a time: two in stalls, one washing hands and one grooming at a mirror. To meet the new wheelchair turning requirements, stall partitions were sometimes removed and the main door to the toilet was fitted with a lock. While this particular alteration reduced service efficiency, it ushered in an important development in public toilet safety and comfort. Some toilets began to function as 'family', 'unisex' or 'gender-neutral' toilet rooms. Children, elderly and disabled people could be accompanied by opposite sex caregivers, and members of the LGBT community gained some protection from the risk of harassment.

2000s to 2010s In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, new security concerns further prompted cities to close down public facilities. Periods of economic slump and shrinkage in the tax base slowed design and construction of appropriate facilities. Renovation to bring traditional facilities up to current standards became difficult. Many of the beautiful comfort stations built in America's cities in the early twentieth century had won protection as historic buildings and could not be easily changed.⁷ While the decrease in the number of available stalls in the United States is unknown, a similar dynamic in Great Britain has led to an estimated closure of half of existing facilities in the decade between 2004 and 2014.⁸



The demise of tax-supported facilities have forced people to become customers of businesses that offer restrooms.

2010 to Present The 21st century has brought new dynamism in urban lifestyles and increased demand for toilet availability. North Americans' embrace of livability and their desire to reside in urban areas that serve walkers and cyclists has resulted in a revival of downtowns. Combined with the imperatives of climate change, this

has resulted in public policy and urban design that favor smart growth, multi-modal transit and reduced carbon emissions. Unfortunately, public toilet construction has not kept pace with that of sidewalks, trails, bicycle infrastructure and transit systems. In this same period, social changes have highlighted the inadequacy of traditional men's and women's restrooms to serve those with opposite sex caregivers and to protect those who face harassment there. Revisions of the 2012 International Plumbing Code opened the way to assisted-use and all-gender toilets. Although voluntary and applicable only to a direct access, single-occupancy layout, it involves a simple change of signs that can significantly increase the number of users served.⁹ Universally accessible toilets alleviate lines at the toilet room serving women and makes the overall flow of users more efficient. Since 2010, transgendered people and children with gender dysphoria have scored significant victories in local jurisdictions and institutions through North America. In 2013, the Philadelphia City Council led the way with a law requiring new or renovated city-owned buildings to include all-gender restrooms.

⁷ PHLUSH, "Comfort Stations," <http://www.phlush.org/public-restroom-planning/portland-public-restroom/comfort-stations/>, accessed October 7, 2015.

⁸ Stephen Hayward and Phil Cardy, "Scandal of lost public toilets as council cuts leave us with nowhere to go," *Mirror*, August 1, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/scandal-lost-public-toilets-council-6177897>, accessed September 25, 2015.

⁹ American Restroom Association. National Model Comprehensive Building Code. <http://www.americanrestroom.org/code/>, accessed September 20, 2015.

Washington DC is enforcing an ordinance stating that single-occupancy restrooms can no longer be labeled as gender-specific. The White House and Eisenhower Executive Office Building have all-gender facilities. Seattle recently required both City-controlled and privately occupied public accommodations to label existing and future single-stall bathrooms as ‘all-gender’ restrooms.¹⁰ While these laws have no impact on traditional, multi-stall men’s and women’s, they may spur a creative revolution in facility design that any city hoping to attract visitors will be unable to ignore.

Despite this new demand for facilities to meet rapidly changing societal needs, public toilet design remains, in the words of urban design scholar Clara Greed, “a despised, outcast branch of architecture, just as it is a stigmatized subject of general discourse.”¹¹ Barbara Penner, who authored the book *Bathroom*, notes that “Toilets threaten to contaminate the purity of architectural discourse—its discipline—by contaminating the divide between high and low, matter and spirit, temple and outhouse, on which it still implicitly depends.”¹² Although regrettable, it’s not surprising that the New Urbanists have been nearly silent on the topic. States Greed, “My colleagues and I have argued from our research that if the government wants to get people out of their cars and back onto public transport, walking and cycling then public toilets are the missing link.”¹³

There is a huge gap in the design and provision of this essential urban infrastructure that serves a universal human physiological need. We see this gap as an opportunity. This is a niche that welcomes the efforts of citizens striving to make their cities livable and their streets complete. Let’s remember the words of

Margaret Mead: *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

Find your words

We’re comfortable with the term ‘public toilet.’ The alternatives do not seem as useful. ‘Restroom’ is misleadingly euphemistic as it implies you can dally and rest. ‘Bathroom’ works fine for some people even though we don’t normally bathe in public toilets. ‘Washroom’, with which Canadians refer to shared public facilities, is not widely used elsewhere and for some individuals it means ‘laundry room’ or ‘mudroom’.



The layout of traditional men’s and women’s contrasts with that of direct access toilets.

As for the terms ‘men’s room’ and ‘women’s room’ or the ‘Gents’ and the ‘Ladies’, they refer to facilities that have a number of partitioned stalls in a room with shared space around sinks and urinals. This kind of layout works best in places with fast-paced foot traffic such as airports, theaters, or stadiums. Men’s and women’s rooms contrast with direct access toilets in which the toilet stall is entered directly through a single door from a public area. Sometimes called ‘unisex,’

¹⁰ Joel Connelly, [Seattle moves to require all-gender-single-stall restrooms in city buildings and places of business](http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/2015/08/10/seattle-moves-to-require-all-gender-single-stall-restrooms-in-city-buildings-and-places-of-business/), Seattle PI. August 10, 2015., <http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/2015/08/10/seattle-moves-to-require-all-gender-single-stall-restrooms-in-city-buildings-and-places-of-business/>, accessed September 25, 2015.

¹¹ Greed, Clara, “Creating a Nonsexist Restroom,” in Moloch and Norén, *Toilet*, (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 117.

¹² Penner, Barbara. “Entangled with a User: Inside Bathrooms with Alexander Kira and Peter Greenaway.” in Moloch and Norén. *Toilet*. (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 229.

¹³ Greed, *ibid*, 139.

direct access toilets include both smaller single-user or larger family toilet rooms and better meet the needs of contemporary society.

Family toilets serve anyone who may require the assistance of an opposite sex caregiver: disabled people, young children, or the growing numbers of older Americans are opting for active downtown living where they can give up driving and 'age in place.' Single-user direct access stalls make it possible for young parents to watch their children from a distance as they safely enter and exit stalls. LGBT-activists are promoting sensible concepts of privacy and the new term 'all-gender toilet.'

The word 'Toilet', because of joint reference to the fixture and the space, may sound harsh to some. 'Public toilet' is an oxymoron because private bodily acts are performed in a space designated as 'public'. However, it is a term understood by everybody and doesn't imply you can rest or bathe. It's used in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Singapore. PHLUSH appreciates the practicality of the term 'public toilet' and uses it frequently, although not exclusively.

In discussing toilet matters, we advise using any words that work in your community. Listen for what terms people are comfortable using. Mix it up if you wish. Bathroom, restroom, latrine, comfort room,

powder room, toilet room, washroom, water closet, W.C., public lavatory, lav, convenience, amenity, facility, necessity, whatever. The City of Portland made a good choice of the term 'loo' to name the singular new product developed there - The Portland Loo. We also like 'comfort station', a distinctly American term from the early 20th century, to refer to public toilets in parks, such as the modern Kellogg Park South Comfort Station in San Diego. The term 'toilet facility' can refer to almost any free-standing open space toilet.

An issue that makes discussion of public restrooms even more challenging is Americans' sense of linguistic propriety.

Victorian euphemism dominated American radio and television for years.

In the 1950s, producers could not imply that married people had sexual relations nor describe a woman as "pregnant." By the end of the century all the formerly censored themes were being used: nudity, gay sex, incest, menstruation, masturbation. While the bedroom door has opened, the bathroom door remains largely closed.¹⁴



This comfort station in a Cincinnati park is typical of facilities built in the first half of the 20th century.

¹⁴ PHLUSH, "Sanitation Policy Advocacy in Flush-and-Forget America," (presentation), World Toilet Summit, Philadelphia, PA, Dec. 3-6, 2010, accessed September 23, 2015, <http://www.phlush.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Sanitation-Policy-Advocacy-In-Flush-Forget-America.pdf>

As for the products and processes of elimination, word choice remains difficult. Safe words include urine, urinate, and urination, but pee and peeing are words most people are comfortable using in public. Similarly, feces, defecate and defecation can become poo and pooping or pooping - childish words rarely offend.

This otherwise simple and useful term 'shit' can't be used in the electronic media nor in most local print media¹⁵, which are tools advocates use. It is, however, increasingly seen and heard in serious academic circles. Author and speaker Rose George uses it¹⁶ and it appears in the name of an ongoing project¹⁷ funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In a discussion among a small group of people assessing a toilet technology or designing a facility, however, avoiding the term is awkward. We recommend getting the okay from all parties to any discussion where the word may be used.

The first step is to get the conversation underway, starting wherever people are. Remember that as values evolve so do concepts of public space and the words used to talk about shared toilets. Our advocacy needs to capture the pace of societal change.

Frame the conversation

Sanitation issues can be framed by something larger, more important, less frightening, or simply more clearly aligned with "the right thing to do."

Is your business in a district with lots of "Restrooms for Customer Only" signs? A district where everyone would be served by a public restroom?

Then consider framing the conversation in terms of good business practice. Refer to the ample evidence on the impact of restrooms on businesses. Discuss costs and benefits of providing or denying access to restrooms. Point out that the negative signs are unfriendly and that a quality shared facility would make the whole district welcoming.

Are you a group of parents advocating for a restroom to serve a park or a Little League field?

Then consider framing the conversation in terms of health, fitness and the growing epidemic of childhood obesity. How come some kids never join in? Could it be the frequent need "to go"? Would kids abandon their video game and become more active if better accommodated? Can we get data from parents or the kids themselves? Would more community members, including grandparents, come to games and support local sports if there were better toilet facilities?

Does your downtown have unhoused residents who have access to toilets only during the day when social service agencies are open? Do you need a 24/7 facility?

Then frame the conversation in terms of basic dignity, human rights and everyone's need to meet physiological needs. And don't focus on the homeless - advocate for clean and safe toilets for everybody.

Does your local wading pool need a restroom?

¹⁵ Timothy Bella, "The '7 Dirty Words' Turn 40, but They're Still Dirty," *The Atlantic*, May 24, 2012.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/05/the-7-dirty-words-turn-40-but-theyre-still-dirty/257374/>, accessed October 16, 2015.

¹⁶ Rose George, *The Big Necessity*, New York: Henry Holt, 2008, and Rose George, "Lets Talk Crap. Seriously," TED, 2013, https://www.ted.com/talks/rose_george_let_s_talk_crap_seriously?language=en, accessed September 25, 2015.

¹⁷ Sustainable Sanitation Alliance, SFD Promotion Initiative, <http://www.susana.org/en/forum/96-shit-flow-diagrams>, accessed September 23, 2015.

This is a situation where you might even count on the ‘yuck factor.’ Little kids will pee in wading pools. While this is not dangerous, people don’t like it, even though they like little kids.

Are you talking with urban planners about the need for greater access to public restrooms?

Then speak their language. Make the case that urban livability is served by integrating safe toilets into shared urban space. Point out that multi-generational groups are unlikely to gather in places otherwise designed for them if toilets are absent. Mention that families that include the very old, the very young or pregnant and menstruating women may stay away. Activating outdoor city spaces means meeting people’s needs.

Are you advocating with transportation for the inclusion of public toilets serving transit riders and pedestrians?

Then try to find out how many people do not walk or use transit because of the lack of facilities. Don’t worry if you don’t find statistics on this. Anecdotal evidence is often enough. The inconvenience of not having a place “to go” along their route keeps many people commuting by car. Find such individuals, get their stories, and protect their anonymity if requested. Engage bus, train and taxi drivers on the topic. How often do riders ask them where they can find a restroom? Have they had to take vehicles out of service following riders’ “accidents”?

Are you meeting with law enforcement folks, some of whom think that the best restroom is one that stays closed?

If so, speak in terms of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). Show them some ways that

public toilets can be made safer and more resistant to vandalism.

Are you speaking with engineers from the Department of Water and Sewer?

If you are advocating an open space or sidewalk toilet unit, their cooperation and knowledge of how the pipes lay underground will be essential in determining possible sites. As they may have less experience in toilet construction and use, take the opportunity to promote the advantages. Their technical teams work throughout the city, and labor laws and OSHA require employers to ensure toilet availability. Locations that can serve city workers and commercial and transit drivers may save hundreds of hours of labor lost when employees must return to their headquarters for bathroom breaks.

Are you looking for allies in the medical establishment?

These professionals may not have thought much about publicly available toilets. Using words like “urination” and “defecation,” mention that you’re interested in both the visible and invisible conditions of the “restroom challenged” population. Engage them with questions about the physical and psychological impact of restricted access and find out what diseases and injuries make toilet non-availability particularly troublesome.

Use fun facts and humor

Advocacy groups may want to eschew humor in the outset and focus on positive change. Humor requires care and a good sense of who you’re conversing with. But what do you do when the people you’re addressing keep making toilet puns? You go with the flow unless the flow is inappropriate.

Case Story:

CEPTIA founders say "We were just having fun with it"

When pay locks suddenly appeared on restroom stalls throughout the United States in the late 1960s, four Ohio boys decided to take action.

"We thought we could do something about it," said Michael Gessel. "Now, could we really do something about it? At the time, we were in high school. We really didn't know how to exercise political power, but we thought we'd have fun with it. And we didn't like pay toilets." They formed the Committee to end Pay Toilets in America (CEPTIA) and stayed in touch after they went off to college. With a budget of \$25.20 they created a logo, a bumper sticker, a fight song anthem, and a quarterly Free Toilet Paper. CEPTIA's position that pay toilets are an infringement of a basic human right met fierce opposition from lock companies and businesses with toilets who saw payment as a constitutional right.

Allies appeared, however, in the feminist movement. Urinals in mens' rooms could not be locked while women needed to insert a dime at every stall. Guerrilla marketing and pre-Internet networking resulted in public toilet advocacy's most stunning success. By 1980, all 50,000 locks were gone from American restroom stalls!

[Source: Gordon, 2015](#)

Toilet history is fun, especially the stories of the valiant souls who have fought for urban public conveniences over the past century and a half. There were and still are lots of bumps on the road. Our light-hearted handout "A Brief History of Public Toilet Advocacy" will give your audience rare expertise they may enjoy.

A PHLUSH colleague has opened serious technical sessions with the question "Now, who here poops?" Hands go up slowly, people smile, and everyone comes together in the universality that drives the rest of the discussion. A local government official introduced a PHLUSH emergency sanitation workshop by asking professional and volunteer

first responders to call out all the names they had for human excreta. Everyone was smiling and relaxed when the session began.

For Jack Sim, the Founder of the World Toilet Organization, humor is at the heart of his effectiveness as a sanitation advocate. Almost single handedly, this acclaimed social entrepreneur has broken the international taboo about talking about toilets and sanitation. His success lies in his use of humor to focus attention on complex and serious issues. Starting as a public toilet advocate in his native Singapore, by 2013 Sim had persuaded the United Nations to officially declare November 19 World Toilet Day.

Says Sim:

We tell jokes and we make it very funny, so the media really loves our stories.

If we had not legitimized the toilet subject and turned it from a dirty word into a clean word, I think it would have been very difficult for a politician to do that.

When people make fun, when they laugh, it is a positive. It means that they are listening and paying attention. There are thousands of agendas competing for attention. Our agenda is "shit". It is right at the bottom and if you want to compete with visibility for this agenda, then you need to get attention. We called ourselves the WTO (World Toilet Organization). That sounds like World Trade Organization. It gets attention. Then you tell about the serious facts of 2.5 billion people not having toilets, and the 1 million children dying of diarrhea and diseases every year, and how girls drop out of school because the schools have no toilets and all that. And if you start telling this too seriously, they fall asleep. So you tell them something quite funny, and then you tell them something quite serious.

Make the case for public toilets

Once you have an idea of the type of language appropriate for your community, your group should agree on some basic messages. Why are you advocating public restrooms? What's the big deal? What difference will they make? Consider brainstorming ideas and then writing up the best ones in language everyone can remember.

When PHLUSH wanted to get the conversation started in our community, we settled on just a few sentences that we could remember. This helped us overcome the initial nervousness of speaking to city officials and the media. We couched several of our points in the language of urban livability because this is something the people of Portland, Oregon care about. Then we made sure we reached the business community and public health specialists. At first, we only talked about 'public restrooms' but in time moved toward 'public toilets', which includes both restrooms in buildings and facilities in open spaces and sounds more international.

Today our list looks more or less like what is below. Our points are general and speak to overall toilet availability. Note that they are all positive. We don't talk about the need to make restrooms vandal-resistant until someone brings up vandalism. (Which they will; those responses require additional message development discussed in later sections.)

Your group may use this list verbatim or change the language to suit your objectives. If you're promoting a specific installation in a given area, it would be advisable to explain how it will serve various people in your community.

Public toilets are fundamental to human dignity.

The ability to respond to a universal biological need is a human right. Beyond these fundamentals, public restrooms deliver multiple benefits to contemporary communities.

Public toilets make good business sense.

For visitors to a neighborhood or to an establishment, the restroom is often the place where first and lasting impressions are made.

Public toilets contribute to public health.

They support physical activity and fitness by enabling people to be moving and at ease in outdoor spaces away from home. Adverse health effects result from involuntary urinary retention. It can be mentally stressful when people want to be out with their families and friends and restrooms are not available.

Public toilets help revitalize downtown areas and foster urban livability.

People are comfortable being in places where they know they can find public facilities. They stroll, window shop, linger in commercial districts. Families organize multi-generational events in public parks that properly accommodate their youngsters and oldsters.

Public toilets inspire people to get out of cars and onto their feet, bicycles and mass transit.

Commuters need restrooms along their routes. Without facilities that serve public transit systems, more people will drive.

Public toilets serve people who are "restroom challenged."

We use the term 'restroom challenged' to refer to folks who really need toilets nearby when they're away from home. First, there are those who need to go almost hourly. These people may have normal conditions – young age, old age, females who are pregnant or menstruating – or medical

conditions, many of which are invisible. Second, there are those whose need for a toilet becomes urgent without warning. These include most people with chronic conditions such as Crohn's disease and colitis as well as those temporarily afflicted with food-borne illnesses. Third, there are people with mobility impairments for whom physically getting to and using a restroom just takes time and effort.

Combat 'toilet blindness'

The taboo against talking about our universal need to use the toilet is so deeply entrenched it's as if society is blind to toilets. When we engage the public in discussion of their priorities, we need to realize that they likely will not initiate talk about their need to use a bathroom when they and their families are away from home. At the same time, we know some people avoid physical activities that put them out of range of toilet facilities. Attitudinal research or public participation surveys that fail to allow or welcome respondents to state preferences regarding toilets may cause skewed results.

We suspect that the lack of available toilets may cause some people to alter their daily choices regarding transportation, outdoor recreation, and entertainment. Research into the factors that encourage active aging, childhood fitness, urban livability, and transit use has failed to look at toilets. Simply search a recent report using keywords: toilet, bathroom, restroom, washroom, WC, conveniences, amenities, and facilities. It's unlikely you will turn up anything on people's need and desire to meet universal physiological needs when they are away from home.

Surveys, questionnaires, checklists, appraisal forms, focus group guides and preference inventories need to specifically mention restrooms. Give people permission to talk about these things and they will.

Pay attention to surveys issued by urban planners, parks officials, transit authorities, and pedestrian advocates. Ask them to include one small item about toilet availability. This question works: *Have you or anyone you know ever hesitated to __ (walk, bicycle, take transit, visit a farmers' market) ___ because of concern about toilet availability?* Or provide a list of amenities that includes restrooms and ask respondents to rank in order of preference or to rate individually using a simple 1-to-4 scale. This is the only way to find out how important public toilets are to a large group of respondents.

Case Story:

Survey validity requires specific mention of restrooms

Arlington, Virginia's parks department regularly surveyed users. It was not until researchers designed a survey that specified the otherwise "unspoken" issue of toilet availability that they understood how important the issue was. Once researchers designed a questionnaire that asked respondents to rank order a long list of priorities that "year round restrooms" shot up to second place after drinking fountains. By overcoming survey bias, Arlington was able to mobilize funding for more restrooms, support for winterization that allowed year round use and additional restroom signage.

Surveys need to allow people to use their voices in favor of something they really want but have been conditioned to not talk about.

Source: American Restroom Association <http://americanrestroom.org/pnr/>

The taboo against introducing toilet needs into public discourse has persisted too long. Simple steps like these can yield surprising results, leverage the conversation, and lead to policy change.