



The Washington Alley Project

A Field Guide to Public Space Advocacy

Edited by The Washington Alley Project

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The Washington Alley Project: A Field Guide to Public Space Advocacy is a richly illustrated, practice-based guide that reimagines urban alleys as vital, inclusive, and participatory public spaces. Centered on Washington, D.C., this field guide blends design thinking, grassroots organising, and urban policy to offer a replicable model for civic action in overlooked spaces. At its core, the guide addresses a critical and often ignored component of urban design: the potential of alleys to serve as meaningful public spaces. In many American cities, alleys are perceived as hidden, utilitarian zones—reserved for waste collection, parking, or delivery access. **The Washington Alley Project** reframes this perception by demonstrating that alleys can support community interaction, small business growth, environmental sustainability, and artistic expression.

The guide is both a conceptual framework and a practical toolkit. Rather than focusing solely on design outcomes, the guide emphasises process—an open, iterative model of engagement and exploration. Crucially, the guide illustrates how design professionals can play a central role in public space advocacy. As spatial thinkers and community connectors, designers are uniquely positioned to translate civic aspirations into tangible design interventions. The project includes several examples of author-led initiatives that have demonstrated the impact of thoughtful, small-scale design in transforming public perception around alleys. Grounded in the success of the Washington Alley Project, the book provides both inspiration and instruction: visualising forgotten spaces in new ways and offering the tools to make those visions real.

The Washington Alley Project is led by EL Studio, a Washington, D.C.–based architecture and design practice committed to advancing civic engagement and equitable urban transformation through design. The project is spearheaded by Mark Lawrence, AIA, and Elizabeth Emerson, AIA, co-founders of EL Studio, who are both practicing architects and academics.

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