

## Defining Naming Criteria for Municipal Places

**Purpose of Naming Public Spaces:** Naming public places is a powerful civic act—one that shapes our collective memory, expresses our community values, and tells the stories we believe are worth preserving. The names we assign to parks, streets, and civic spaces become part of our cultural fabric, and they influence how current and future generations relate to the land and to each other. Thoughtful naming practices invite dialogue, honor historical truth, and help build a more inclusive public narrative.

When approached intentionally, naming is also an opportunity: an opportunity to articulate a shared vision for the future, to elevate community voices, and to advance healing and understanding. By treating naming as more than a symbolic gesture—and instead, as a form of civic storytelling—we create space for recognition, reflection, and connection.

**Framing the Naming Process as an Opportunity:** The mission of the committee is to steward a process that is inclusive, transparent, and reflective of the many histories, values, and voices that shape our community. A well-chosen name can cultivate shared pride, reinforce a community's identity, and offer future generations a deeper sense of place and belonging. This process invites the public to participate in civic storytelling, transforming the idea of a name from a mere question into a gesture of inclusion and trust.

**Narratives to Guide Naming Public Places:** Understanding the historical and cultural context of a place is foundational. Every public space exists within a layered history—some of it celebrated, some of it painful. Responsible naming requires that we explore the past and current uses of a space and acknowledge the impacts of colonization, erasure, and cultural loss. We must ask whose stories have been silenced and whose voices deserve to be centered.

Equity and inclusivity are not simply procedural requirements but moral imperatives. The naming process should engage with those who have historically been excluded—especially Indigenous peoples and communities of color—and must provide clear, welcoming pathways for their participation. Policies should be regularly revisited to remain relevant, reflective, and responsive.

Transparency and process integrity build public trust. Naming or renaming should not happen behind closed doors. Instead, the process must be clearly communicated, criteria must be publicly available, and decisions must be documented. This includes coordination across jurisdictions and agencies when necessary.

Relevance and accuracy ensure that a name resonates with place and meaning. A name should not mislead, distort, or appropriate. Instead, it should reflect a site's physical, historical, and cultural realities and invite inquiry and understanding.

Sensitivity to community impact acknowledges that naming can both heal and harm. We must consider the emotional, educational, and symbolic effects of a name—particularly for those who live near or engage regularly with the space. A naming decision should be one the community can embrace, not endure.

**Best Practices for Implementation:** Place naming is not just a technical task—it is an opportunity for education, healing, and visioning. Cities and towns that embrace this work thoughtfully often find that naming becomes a gateway to deeper civic engagement.

- Conduct broad-based community consultation prior to decision-making.
- Ensure participation from youth, elders, and diverse community organizations.
- Use naming as a tool for public education and civic dialogue.
- Include signage, digital tools, or exhibitions to explain the meaning and context of names.

**Legal and Administrative Considerations:**

- Ensure no violation of trademark law unless appropriate permissions are obtained.
- Respect jurisdictional boundaries—some places require federal, state, and local sign-offs.
- Some jurisdictions require honorees to be deceased or to have made significant contributions.

**Examples of Additional Guidelines (from case studies):**

- Names should be reasonably short, unique, and culturally relevant.
- Retain or restore names that reflect Indigenous language and traditions.
- Avoid duplicative or similar names that might create public confusion.
- Avoid naming after living politicians or figures unless exceptional criteria are met.

**Resources for Further Guidance:**

- National Recreation and Park Association – Parks for Inclusion
- Native Governance Center – Naming and Sovereignty Resources
- Highline Network – Community First Toolkit
- 106 Group – Equitable Naming Practices Report
- URA/SBNB Guidelines for Naming Buildings and Estates