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Barriers to change: lessons from the ACT Young Planners' parklet

In May 2018, PIA's ACT Young Planners delivered Canberra's first ever parklet. Almost two years in the making, the "Pocket Park" parklet converted a car parking space on one of Canberra's favourite urban restaurant and retail streets into a temporary park for people.

The Pocket Park sought to diversify the car-dominated streetscape by providing a public space with seating, landscaping and art for the people of Canberra to use and enjoy. The parklet delivered peer-reviewed benefits to the public throughout its installation.

As the first parklet to be delivered in the ACT, Pocket Park provided a range of lessons for government in its role as regulator and activator of public space. This presentation will highlight some of the major challenges the project team encountered in the regulatory context of the ACT. It will provide some discussion on why these exist, and provide some potential high level directions to ensure similarly innovative, community-led small activations continue to be embraced in Australia.

A major challenge this parklet faced, for discussion in this presentation, is that the presented a problem not previously solved by the ACT Government. The existing regulatory standards and frameworks did not apply to Pocket Park, and there was a lack of openness to change to fit something 'outside the box'. This resulted in a requirement to apply the regulatory framework for high-speed traffic, large concrete crash barriers, to a small scale extension of the footpath in an already highly pedestrianised environment.

For small, innovative, community-led projects to succeed, they require flexible, outcomes-focused regulation. A key part of this is the willingness of regulators to understand and engage with risk. The literal concrete barriers of the Pocket Park project highlight the regulatory barriers facing similar installations, which must be overcome in the interests of improving planning outcomes for Australian communities.

