

STEP 3 - ASSESSING MY COMMUNITY

CHAPTER 3: ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNITY FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

There are a lot of personal and environmental factors that influence physical activity. Try and consider as many factors as possible in developing your Active Community Environments (ACEs) plan. Some of those factors for consideration are listed in Table 3.

Figure 3: Factors Influencing the Choice to Walk or Bicycle

Personal and subjective factors	Environmental Factors
Distance	Distance
Traffic safety	Traffic safety
Weather	Convenience
Topography	Cost
Infrastructural features:	Valuation of time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian/Bike facilities, traffic conditions • Access and linkage of pedestrian / bicycle facilities to desirable destinations • Existence of competitive transportation alternatives 	Valuation of exercise
	Physical condition
	Family circumstances
	Habits
	Attitudes and Values
	Peer group acceptance

Source: Federal Highway Administration, *National Bicycling and Walking Study: Case Study No. , 1994*

One way to better understand how your community environment and personal preferences are influencing activity levels is to assess the current status of some factors in the community.

There are many ways to do this, but here are three suggestions:

1. Do a community environmental assessment (Chapter 3, Part 1).
2. Look at related data and information from existing data sources that might be helpful in your decision-making. (Chapter 3, Part 2).
3. Do a community health habits and interest survey. (Chapter 3, Part 3).

HOW TO ASSESS THE ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT?

Why do an assessment?

The purpose of completing the assessment is to identify your community's strengths and areas in need of improvement. The assessment will lead your committee to recommend actions for changes to make the community more supportive of healthy behaviors. You may find some of the actions for supporting healthy behaviors are easy to do and others may not be feasible or efficient in your community.

The assessment results can also be used as a baseline measure for evaluation. The initial assessment can later be compared with a follow-up assessment several months or years later to note progress.

Who should do the assessment?

Identify a workgroup (at least 4-5 people) who will be responsible for completing the assessment. This may be a subset of your ACEs committee. Forming a diverse group from all

areas and levels of your community is important for meaningful assessment and successful planning and implementation. Suggested participants include: government leaders, city planners, public works and transportation staff, parks and recreation staff, business leaders, public health staff, neighborhood group leaders and school staff.

When should the assessment be done?

Use the assessment as a starting point for your wellness initiative. Once you have completed the assessment, determine which areas the committee will focus on (i.e. walkable neighborhoods, master plans, parks and recreation, etc.). Establish a time for the committee to meet and monitor the progress. Also determine a schedule for annual assessments, so that the assessment can serve as a tool for continuous improvement and accountability over time.

What do I need?

- ❖ An assessment workgroup
- ❖ The ACEs community assessment tool
- ❖ Knowledge of and access to other data that might be helpful
- ❖ The community physical activity survey tool
- ❖ Some time
- ❖ Someone to collate and summarize the results
- ❖ A way to share and publicize the results

ASSESSMENT TOOLS

PART 1: ACEs ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Complete the ACEs Assessment Checklist to determine what physical activity components you currently have in your community. This can be done with the full committee or you may want a few key personnel (such as the ACEs Coordinator, Committee Chair, city planner, etc.) to do a preliminary scan based on information they gather and then let the full committee react to their findings.

A sample of an abridged completed checklist can be found on the next page.

A complete version of the checklist can be found in Appendix B.

Completion of the checklist provides a reference point of the community's policies, environmental supports and program activities that are currently in place to encourage and support physical activity.

CHECKLIST COMPONENTS:

1

Categories. There are six major categories:

- A – Provide walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with a variety of destinations
- B – Provide a variety of public transit options
- C – Provide accessible parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces
- D – Create and maintain a master land-use development plan
- E – Provide a safe and pleasant environment
- F – Develop coordinated partnerships

Each category has several associated indicators that address what your community currently has in place and what you might want to consider having in your community.

2

Points. Point values are assigned to each strategy. When you do your assessment, you will circle the point value that best represents the status of the component for your community and then add up your points for each section. At the end of each category, sub-total the number in each column and then total all of the categories at the end of the checklist to get an overview of where your community environment currently rates (A sample can be found on the next page). You should also use this baseline measure as a benchmark for later evaluation. By evaluating where your community is on each component, you will be able to get a general idea of your status across each category and all of the items.

3

Potential Priorities. After you have completed the assessment, the physical activity interest survey and reviewed available data, you can use the *potential priority* column to indicate what components you might want to focus on that are either currently in process or don't exist. This can serve as a first screening of possible areas to focus on as you develop your action plan, which is described in Step Five.

Example:

1

2

3

B – Create And Maintain a Master Land-Use Development Plan	Points	Potential Priority
1. Smart Growth B 1.1 Is there a “smart growth” policy in place? No (0 pts), Yes (2 pts)	0 or 2	<input type="checkbox"/>
B 1.2 Do zoning regulations encourage compact community design with a higher population density and a tighter mixture of activities. No (0 pts), Yes (2 pts)	0 or 2	<input type="checkbox"/>

PART 2: USING AVAILABLE DATA

You may be able to access other key data that already exists for your community. Health data is probably available at a local or regional level and various entities involved in ACEs often survey their residents. Examples of existing data might include:

Data Sources:

- ❖ Demographic data about your community
- ❖ Health data such as the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)
<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/wish/main/BRFS/BRFSHome.htm>
- ❖ Health data such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/stats/s-behyouth.htm>
- ❖ Community Health Improvement Process (CHIP) – Check with your local health department for information about this process and resulting plan.

Audit tools:

- ❖ Walkability checklist – A checklist to rate how friendly your community is for walking.
<http://drusilla.hsrb.unc.edu/cms/downloads/walkabilitychecklist.pdf>
- ❖ Bikeability checklist – A checklist to rate how friendly your community is for biking.
<http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=3>
- ❖ The Analytic and Checklist Audit Tools were developed to measure features of the street-scale environment related to recreational and transportation based physical activity such as walking and biking. <http://www.activelivingresearch.org/node/10616>
- ❖ Smart Growth Scorecard (Colorado) – A Community Self-Assessment Scorecard

http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/scorecards/Colorado_Scorecard.pdf

Identifying this data will serve two purposes:

- 1) It will help you decide what the big health issues are for your community and it will allow you to better target those issues.
- 2) It will serve as “baseline” data to compare against later to see if your efforts have made a difference. Building this evaluation measure in at the beginning will help you prove the value of your ACEs initiative.

PART 3: HOW TO GET COMMUNITY INPUT

Why would you want to do a community survey?

The more you know about your target audience, the more likely you will design an initiative that meets their needs and interests. You can find additional information and resources about the use of Social Marketing at:

<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/Sites/Community/SocialMarketing.htm>

Depending on how much information is already available in your community, you may want to conduct a community survey to get a better understanding of your target audience (your community’s residents) and get an initial idea of two things: 1) their current health habits; and 2) their interest areas. The survey can be tailored to your community and can be done in paper form or through the use of survey instruments on the internet or that can be purchased. Using a computer survey instrument has the added advantage of being able to collect and analyze data automatically.

- ❖ An example of a health habits question would be: *On how many of the past 7 days did you exercise or participate in moderate or rigorous physical activity for at least 30 minutes total?*
 0 days 1 day 2 days 3 days 4 days 5 days 6 days 7 days
- ❖ An example of an interest survey question would be: *If available, would you use maps of neighborhood walking routes?*
 Yes No Unsure

As was the case with the community environmental assessment, the community survey results can also be used as a baseline measure for later evaluation. The initial survey results can later be compared with a follow-up survey several months later to note progress.

You might also consider engaging residents in focus groups or informal interviews to gather information on their wants and needs. This can be done either before or after the survey, or if you don’t have the resources to survey residents, you could use this method to gather information in place of the survey.

Whatever method you use to gather information, make it as easy as possible for residents to complete and submit the information so you get a high return rate. Consider offering an incentive or prize for people who complete the survey.

Listed in [Appendix C](#) are sample physical activity survey questions from a variety of sources. If you don’t already have local data, selecting some of the national survey questions will allow you to compare your results with Wisconsin or United States data. You should pick and choose from the survey questions to meet your needs. If you don’t need or want existing comparison data, you can also modify the questions for your specific purposes.

