STEP 4 - STRATEGIES FOR AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY

CHAPTER 4: STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT TO SUPPORT ACTIVE LIVING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS (ACES)

Strategies
Now that you've completed the community assessment, reviewed available data, completed a community survey and compiled the results, it's time to look at strategies that have been proven to work or are best practices from other communities. This chapter lists a number of strategies to consider for your ACEs initiative. You should be able to use the scorecard at the end of the ACEs Assessment Checklist to get an overview of your current ACEs programs or strategies.

There are a number of important characteristics of the built environment that can have a positive impact on physical activity. Making these changes can create healthier communities, which are often referred to as **Active Community Environments (ACES)**

Focus Areas
ACEs initiatives can include many components and activities. This resource kit focuses on policy and environmental changes to increase physical activity and reduce chronic diseases. The following areas are highlighted, using specific activities or strategies to address each area:

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

Each focus area has its own distinct section that contains strategies and then references to additional resources for each strategy where they exist. The resources are highlighted in italics to distinguish them. By looking at each focus area you will get an overview of things that can be done to change the community built environment to make it easier to be active. If you need additional information or resources to implement a strategy, look to the text in italics for more details.

Factors most often cited and the strategies to implement them are listed below:

A – Provide Walkable and Bikeable Neighborhoods

1. Complete Streets
2. Connect Roadways
3. Master Plans
4. School Location

B – Create and Maintain a Master Land-Use Development Plan

1. Smart Growth
2. Transit Oriented Development
3. Mixed Use Neighborhoods
4. Integrate with Bike and Pedestrian Plan

C – Provide Community Resources for Physical Activity: Accessible Parks, Recreation Facilities, and Open Spaces

1. Locate Parks and Facilities to Serve all Populations
2. Offer Park & Recreation programming
3. Allow Public Access to Multi-Use Facilities

D – Provide a Variety of Public Transit Options

1. Invest in Public Transit
2. Ensure the Ability to Walk & Bike to School

E – Provide a Safe and Pleasant Environment

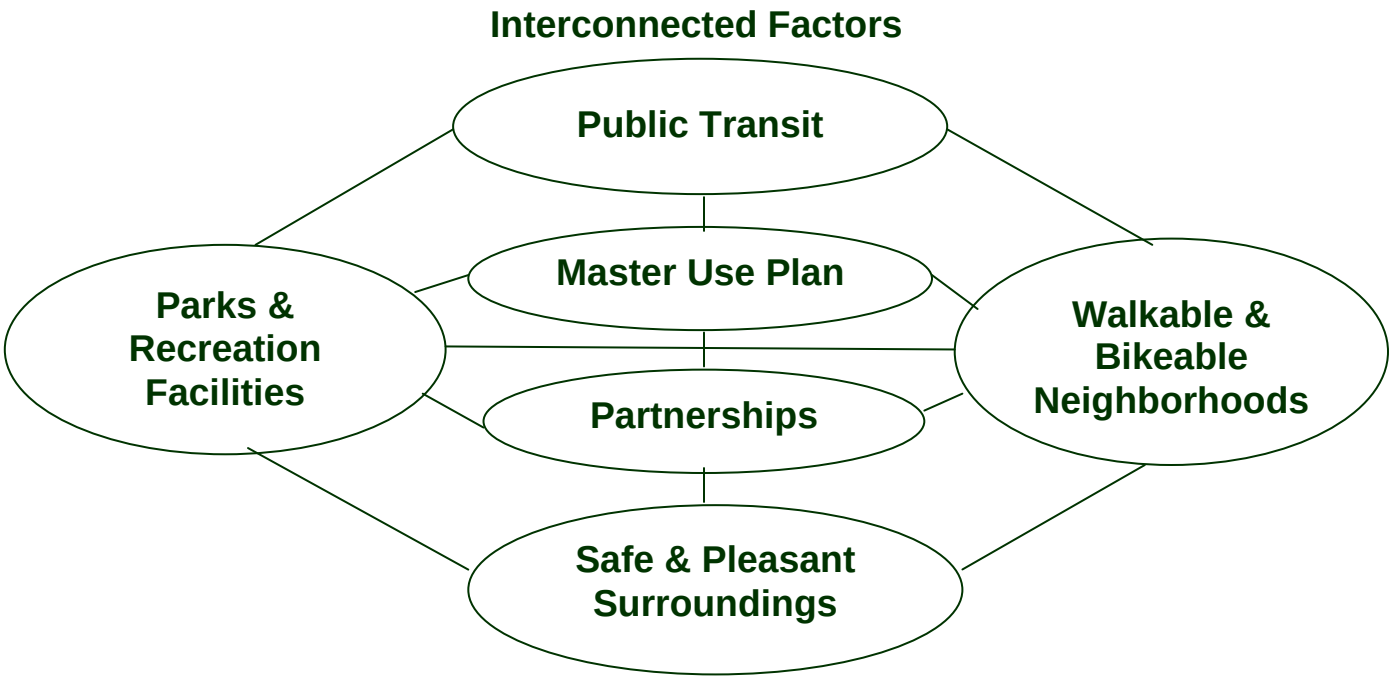
1. Park and Neighborhood Design
2. Vehicle Speed and Police Enforcement
3. Neighborhood Association
4. Construction and Maintenance

F – Develop Coordinated Partnerships

1. Advocacy
2. Communications
3. Neighborhood Involvement

While each of these factors influences the relative convenience and likelihood of active transportation, it is the combination of these factors that is most critical to encourage pedestrian and bicycle trips. Increasing the levels of housing density won't result in much change if the neighborhood isn't safe. Similarly, if the neighborhood doesn't have sidewalks or nearby destinations to walk to, travel by car will always be the first choice. Planning for active community environments requires consideration of all these key factors in order to have the greatest impact.

Figure 5: Interconnected Factors



A- Provide Walkable and Bikeable Neighborhoods

In most communities, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods don't just happen. Knowing what is needed for a "walkable" and "bikeable" community and who can influence those decisions is essential for making it happen. Here are key strategies for this component:

1. **Complete Streets**
2. **Connect Roadways**
3. **Master Plans**
4. **School Location**

1. Complete Streets

- ☐ **Implement complete streets policies** to provide for the safe and convenient travel of all users of the roadway, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit users, motorists, children, seniors, and people with disabilities. Complete streets is a regulatory strategy to ensure that all roads provide routine accommodation for all users, including bicyclists, transit users, and pedestrians of *all ages and abilities,* by including or enhancing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure during routine road maintenance and repair, new construction, and redesign. Comprehensive complete streets solutions include traffic-calming measures, such as:
    - Requiring sidewalks in new development or widen existing sidewalks (5' wide and set back from the road),
    - Creating and maintain bike lanes,
    - Raising medians,
    - Narrowing roadways to decrease car speed,
    - Placing bus stops in a safe and convenient environment,
    - Providing safe crosswalks (i.e. refuge medians, marked crosswalks, bulb outs, etc.)
    - Creating and maintaining trails
    - Providing accommodations for disabled travelers

  The goal is to make alternative transportation choices (bicycling, walking, and public transit) more appealing and accessible.
  For more information go to: *www.completestreets.org*
- ☐ **Conduct neighborhood assessments** to identify opportunities for and barriers to active living. For a walkability and bikeability assessment checklist, go to:
  Walkability: http://www.walkableamerica.org/checklist-walkability.pdf
  Bikeability: http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/pdf/bikabilitychecklist.pdf
  General: http://www.activelivingresearch.org/node/10616
- ☐ **Create and disseminate community-wide or neighborhood maps** of walking and biking routes.

2. Connect Roadways

- ☐ **Connect roadways** to complementary systems of trails and bicycle paths that provide safe places to walk and bicycle for children, seniors, and the general public.
- ☐ **Create trails, when possible**. Walking and bicycle paths, trails, and greenways that are separated from traffic will enable people, especially children and seniors, to walk or bicycle safely from one place to another.
- ☐ **Look for opportunities for Rails-to-Trails conversions.** Look to convert old railway lines into walking and biking trails. *Information and funding for Rails-to-Trails project can be found at: http://www.railstotrails.org/*
- ☐ **Provide safe connections to nearby community destinations** such as parks, schools, retail stores, and workplaces**.** These active transportation systems will result in more physical activity opportunities and trips.

3. **Master Plans (see Section B for more detailed information)**
   - ☐ **Make traditional neighborhood development the standard** for residential areas. Align new streets and highways in a traditional grid pattern. This design offers more route choices, shortens the average trip distance, and reduces the speed of motor vehicles.
   - ☐ **Encourage the adoption of pedestrian and bicycle plans,** which can be incorporated into city master plans and capital improvement programs. These plans will help increase trips by foot and bicycle by increasing transportation connections, options and safety. Examples of policies within plans:
     - Create **ordinances for new subdivisions** that require accommodations for walking and bicycling.
     - Use **traffic calming** measures to make walking and bicycling safer and more comfortable.
     - **Provide places for the disabled to travel** wherever pedestrians are permitted on the public right-of-way.
     - **Distribute transportation funds** to ensure that bicycling and walking friendly provisions are incorporated into new roads and are considered for retro fitting into existing roads.

4. **School Location**
   - ☐ **Place schools in population dense areas**, if possible. Building or renovating schools in neighborhoods that are easy to walk or bike to will increase physical activity. If schools have to be built in less developed areas due to space or cost needs, provide trails or sidewalks to the school as an alternative transportation option. Consider
     - **Location:** Build schools within walking distance of the community population.
     - **Site Design:** Choose and develop bicycle and pedestrian-friendly school sites.
     - **Access:** Make it easy and safe for students to walk and bike to school.
     - **Multi-use Buildings:** Plan and manage schools as multipurpose community centers.
   - ☐ **Encourage Safe Routes to School Programs.** As noted above, the location of schools affects the ability of students, parents, teachers, and administrators to walk or bicycle to school. If a school is in a walkable neighborhood, the development of a Safe Routes to School Program will increase the likelihood that students will walk or bike because of the safer and more structured opportunities that are provided. *Safe Routes to School (SRTS)* is a national effort (http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/) to ensure that children can walk and bicycle safely to school. F*or more Wisconsin information and resources to develop a Safe Routes to School program, go to: http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/localgov/aid/saferoutes.htm. For online descriptions and pictures of Safe Routes principles, go to: http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/index.cfm*
     Consider the following Safe Routes components and see the above websites for details:
     - **Engineering –** (ex: Control cars, designate school drop off zones for cars, speed bumps, etc.)
     - **Education –** (ex: Walkability checklist. What makes for a walkable route?)
     - **Evaluation** – (ex: participation counts, parent survey, etc.)
     - **Enforcement –** (ex: speed checks, crossing guards, etc.)
     - **Encouragement** – (ex: walking school buses, promotions, etc.)

B – Create and Maintain a Master Land-Use Development Plan

Land-use decisions have the potential to impact on public health. A concept known as "Smart Growth" encourages community planning that will also enhance support for active living. Smart Growth controls urban sprawl, focuses on greater population density, and mixed use neighborhoods where residents are close to shopping, parks and commercial developments.

A master plan (also referred to as a city plan, comprehensive plan, or general plan) lays out how development occurs in a community. Policies contained in the master plan layout how renovations and new development take place and the parameters that decide how they are done. Having input on the master plan and incorporating healthy living concepts has the potential to have a widespread impact on the activity levels of citizens affected by the plan. Therefore, it's key that active living advocates have some way to influence the plan. Some possibilities include having active living community members on the planning commission or having partners such as the city planner who can represent the group's interest in any planning decisions.

The bottom line is that active living design considerations should address factors that people expect in order to be active. A 2005 list of the top five expectations about traditionally designed communities listed these items:

1. Allow kids to walk to school
2. Be safe for kids to play in neighborhood
3. Enable people to walk/bike to public transit
4. Enable people to walk/bike to shopping
5. Enable older adults to live independently
   (Handy, Sallis, et.al. J Am Planning Assoc, 2008)

Here are some of the planning strategies to meet those expectations:

1. **Smart Growth**
2. **Transit Oriented Development**
3. **Mixed Use Neighborhoods**
4. **Integrate with Bike and Pedestrian Plan**

1. <u>Smart Growth</u>

Land use patterns that affect physical activity include population density, mixed-use development and site design. These factors affect travel choice in general, and the ability to walk and bike in a neighborhood. Some strategies for incorporating active living into smart growth discussions include:

- ☐ **Encourage compact community design** with a higher population density and a tighter mixture of activities that make it possible to work, play, shop and go to school within walking and bicycling distance of people's homes. By placing higher density housing near commercial centers, transit lines, parks, schools, and work sites, you reduce trip distances and increase the likelihood of walking and biking trips.
- ☐ **Mixed Use - Include provision for mixed use in area development.**
  Mixed-use areas promote physical activity because they locate residential buildings near retail stores, parks and other services industries. The close proximity encourages more pedestrian and bicycle trips.
- ☐ **Integrate health into smart growth considerations.**
  Smart growth concepts such as infill development; compact, transit oriented development; mixed-use buildings; and walkable, bikeable neighborhoods also encourage physical activity. These should be considered part of any master plan, neighborhood plans, and zoning decisions.

- ☐ **Establish the link between land use and transportation plans and priorities.** Approve local ordinances and other policies that are consistent with land use and transportation plans and that promote active living.
- ☐ **Consider the use of health impact assessments for development decisions.** A health impact assessment serves as a tool to evaluate the health impact of any development project or policy (e.g., general plan, school siting, etc.). Whether a health impact assessment is a general consideration step for plan approval or is a formal process is not as important as the fact that it is part of any decision. For more information on health impact assessments, go to:
  General Site for Health Impact Assessment Information:
  http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/hia.htm

  Healthy Development Measurement Tool: *This tool, created by San Francisco comprehensive evaluation metric to consider health needs in urban development plans and projects. http://www.thehdmt.org/*

  Smart Growth: *For more information, go to Smart Growth.org*

2. Transit Oriented Development

- ☐ **Consider multiple means of transit in development policies.** Development should accommodate and encourage multiple ways to travel within the development area. Some considerations that promote multimodal travel are:
  - **Consider "complete streets" in any development** plan, design or construction. Complete streets allow for transit choices and accommodate all users, including bicyclists, transit users, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.
  - **Develop around transit stops** (bus or rail). This encourages short walking or biking trips to use public transit to reach further destinations as well as access jobs, goods, and services that are near the public transit area.
- ☐ **Street Network: align new streets and highways in a traditional grid pattern.** This design offers more route choices, shortens the average trip distance, and reduces the speed of motor vehicles. Design that increases connectivity and provides short trips to "destinations" such as retail stores and parks increases walking and biking trips.
- ☐ **Create or update policies that affect funding**, street design and safety - all factors that increase active transportation. Specific examples of key policies would include:
  - **Require traditional neighborhood design** in new and subdivision development regulations.
  - **Require sidewalks** in new and subdivision regulations.

3. Mixed Use Neighborhoods

- ☐ **Support mixed-use development.** Creating a mix of retail, housing, and transit improves walkability and bikeability by creating convenient locations within a short distance of where people live. Mixed-income housing will also provide access to healthy foods and physical activity opportunities in traditionally underserved neighborhoods by providing close, convenient options.
- ☐ **Promote focused development.** Concentrate commercial and retail development in town centers or in neighborhood locations at an appropriate scale to nearby residential housing.
- ☐ **Establish enterprise zones** that enjoy favorable tax credits to attract businesses for mixed-use development.
- ☐ **Support more population-dense housing** to increase potential pedestrian traffic to nearby destinations.

4. Integrate with Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan

- ☐ **Develop a pedestrian and bicycle plan.** Local pedestrian and bicycle plans raise the visibility of alternative transportation methods and provide a way to incorporate the interests of pedestrians and bicyclists into community development discussions and decisions. By having a say in the community's master plan, consideration in given to connectivity of passages, accessibility, safety and other transportation issues relevant for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- ☐ **Incorporate the pedestrian and bicycle plan into the community's master plan and capital improvement programs.** Once you have a pedestrian and bicycle plan, make sure it is incorporated with the community master plan so it's included in land use and funding decisions.
- ☐ **Use your pedestrian and bicycle plan to advocate** the link between funding and regulations for active living environments that promote walking, bicycling, and public transit. Use the current issues of global warming and the price of gas to advocate for more alternative transportation options.

C – Provide Community Resources for Physical Activity: Accessible Parks, Recreation Facilities, and Open Spaces

Parks, playgrounds, and open spaces provide opportunities for physical activity. However, the presence of facilities is not enough to make sure they are being used for the greatest benefit of all. Factors such as location, accessibility, programming, connectivity, safety and aesthetics all play in a role in the use of public facilities. Here are key factors for this component:

1. **Locate Parks and Facilities to Serve all Populations**
2. **Offer Park and Recreation Programming**
3. **Allow Public Access to Multi-Use Facilities**

1. Locate Parks and Facilities to Serve all Populations

- ☐ **Inventory facilities and parks** and make a resource guide available to the public.
- ☐ **Site parks and recreation facilities in neighborhoods** so that most people can walk or bicycle to the facility.
- ☐ **Create smaller, neighborhood parks** rather than large facilities that people have to drive to.
- ☐ **Link parks, trails, and greenways to local destinations** of interest to ensure that walking and bicycling trips are as convenient as using a car. Create a network of walking and cycling trails that offer functional alternatives to automobile travel and opportunities for exercise, recreation, and community connectedness. Convert out-of-service rail corridors into trails.
- ☐ **Establish parks in new subdivisions:** Include parks and playing fields in the plans for new subdivisions.
- ☐ **Provide public transit to parks:** Encourage bus routes to access parks outside the city or neighborhood. Work with state transportation officials to secure funds for alternative transportation means to and through park and recreation facilities.
- ☐ **Provide opportunities in underserved residential areas**.
- ☐ **Work with community planners** to encourage urban redevelopment and infill as well as making sure new development provides connections between private and public lands and use.

2. Offer Park and Recreation Programming

- ☐ **Offer active programming that encourages physical activity.** Parks and recreation programming (such as swimming, youth sports, etc.) will increase resident use. In addition to drawing more park users, a positive side effect will be a safer park due to the increased use and community ownership.
    - Develop strategies to increase physical activity levels for individuals currently utilizing parks and recreation resources in a passive way. Education & prompts (signage) help.
    - Install signage to highlight active transportation routes and places that support active living.
- ☐ **Consider programming that links to other community initiatives.** Combine with or build off of other community initiatives, such as:
    - Programs
    - Media Campaigns
    - Resource Guides
    - Advocacy Efforts
    - Funding Requests
- ☐ **Complete an assessment/audit** of your facility or park for "bikeability" and "walkability".

3. <u>Allow Public Access to Multi Use Facilities</u>

- ☐ **Establish joint use agreements** that allow use of public schools and other facilities for recreation by the public. Examples would include community recreation programs using school facilities during off hours and schools using community parks and athletic facilities that they don't have on their campus.
- ☐ **Develop public facilities with a broad audience in mind.** Construct school, senior centers and other facilities with a broader community use in mind. Look beyond school day use and develop in a way that will serve the recreation needs of a broad range of the community.

D – Provide a Variety of Public Transit Options

Public transit options are dependent on a number of factors. Although many communities are too small for rail or bus transit options, that doesn't mean that they don't need to consider walking and biking as "public transit" and design options accordingly. Here are key strategies for this component:

1. **Invest in Public Transit**
2. **Ensure the Ability to Walk and Bike to Destinations**

1. <u>Invest in Public Transit</u>

- ☐ **Inventory transit routes** and note their routes in relation to recreational facilities in the community.
- ☐ **Provide funding** for infrastructure to support walking and biking.
  Enhancing America's Communities: A Guide to Transportation Enhancements
  The National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse's (NTEC) popular guidebook features information on federal and state Transportation Enhancement requirements, how to develop a project application, as well as 21 new case studies of TE projects that have successfully contributed to community revitalization.
  <u>http://www.enhancements.org/misc/TEGuide2002.pdf</u>
- ☐ **Designate an assigned staff person** to be responsible for pedestrian and bicycle transportation.
- ☐ **Invest in public transit to provide affordable and reliable multimodal transportation** options for all neighborhoods. Multimodal transportation options increases activity levels.

- ☐ **Place transit stations within walking distance of population-dense areas** to provide the benefit of increased levels of daily walking along with decreased traffic congestion.
- ☐ **Create commuter choice or other workplace incentive programs** that promote the use of public transit, ridesharing and active forms of travel.

2. Ensure the Ability to Walk and Bike to Destinations

- ☐ **Locate schools within walking or biking distance** for many students will increase physical activity.
- ☐ **Promote formal and informal walking and biking programs.** Walking or biking to school builds a daily dose of physical activity into a student's day for about half the days of the year. Schools and parent organizations can help make that happen through formal (Safe Routes to School) or less formal (Walking School Bus) programs.
- ☐ **Encourage alternative transportation that involved walking or biking to work.**
- ☐ **Place public transit stations in key locations**. By increasing the availability of high quality transit service within walking distance of residential, work and shopping areas, you will also increase daily trips on foot.

E – Provide a Safe and Pleasant Environment

Although there is not as much evidence on the effect safety and aesthetics have on physical activity levels, it has been shown to be a factor. Steps to make the walking and biking environment safer and more attractive will have an impact on activity levels. Listed below are some strategies for this component.

1. **Park and Neighborhood Design**
2. **Vehicle Speed and Police Enforcement**
3. **Neighborhood Association**
4. **Construction and Maintenance**

1. Park and Neighborhood Design

- ☐ **Design parks, trails, and greenways to deter crime and enhance safety.** Areas that are clean, well lit and are policed on a regular basis will attract more users. More users will lead to safer environments as residents "self-police" the areas they are regularly using. Parents are more likely to allow their children to bicycle and walk in the neighborhood if they perceive it to be safe. In addition, greater pedestrian and bike traffic makes driver's more aware of these forms of transportation so they drive more carefully as a result.
- ☐ **Create or update community-gathering places** as additional "destinations" and to help create a safe, walking environment.
- ☐ **Create pleasant neighborhood settings.** Site design impacts travel patterns in much the same way as street design. Building design, orientation, and setback, along with other aesthetic considerations, will create environments that are either attractive or unattractive for non-motorized travel. Consider equipment safety, placement of benches, lighting and bike racks when designing public recreation spaces.

2. Vehicle Speed and Police Enforcement

- ☐ **Control Vehicle Speeds.** Control the speed of cars and other traffic in neighborhoods, around schools, and in commercial areas.
- ☐ **Enforce existing laws.** Improve policing and enforcement to help control speed of cars and stop crime. Use neighborhood watch programs to augment police efforts.

3. **Neighborhood Association**
   - ☐ **Design neighborhoods to be safe and aesthetically pleasing** to bring people together, encourage physical activity and decrease crime.
   - ☐ **Start neighborhood watch and safety walks** to create safe communities.
   - ☐ **Use the Neighborhood Association as a major advocate** for active living policies that affect the area.

4. **Construction & Maintenance**
   - ☐ **Ensure sufficient funding** to do regular maintenance, when required.
   - ☐ **Require sidewalks and cross walks** in new construction and considered in updates to existing roads
     - 5' wide sidewalks
     - Buffer strip between the road and sidewalk
   - ☐ **Maintain sidewalks and crosswalks** so that they are safe for year-round use.
     - Debris, leaf and snow removal is required or done by local government
     - Repairs are required or done by local government

F – Develop Coordinated Partnerships

Partnerships are key for changing the built environment because most communities don't have resources specifically dedicated to this purpose. As a result, unique partnerships have to be developed so that a variety of groups and organizations are working towards this effort. Listed below are key factors for this component.

1. **Advocacy**
2. **Communications**
3. **Neighborhood Involvement**

1. **Advocacy**
   - ☐ **Develop and maintain an active living partnership**, coalition, task force or advisory board.
   - ☐ **Form new partnerships or use existing partners in key positions to advocate for active living environments.** Key partners would include local elected officials, city and regional planners, health department officials, school personnel and others with local interest. The broader the group, the greater voice they will have in policy development.
   - ☐ **Sit on local planning committees** or make sure a key partner is on the committee to advocate for active community environments.
   - ☐ **Incorporate healthy community development.** Make sure health considerations are part of the discussion when making decisions about community development. Look at current master plans, ordinances and design guidelines to see how they affect active living.

2. **Communications**
   - ☐ **Collaborate with local organizations** to utilize their communications channels (e.g. newsletters, bulletin boards, websites and list serves) to promote active living. This increases your visibility and creates a greater buy-in to the partnership.
   - ☐ **Develop active living messages** and an awareness campaign based on targeted community research (focus groups, surveys, and testing).
   - ☐ **Become a resource for the media and community** on active living issues.

3. **Neighborhood Involvement**

- ☐ **Start with neighborhood scale change,** which is sometimes easier because it's on a more limited scope. If the master plan already allows for better neighborhood design, start there for a more manageable and immediate impact.
- ☐ **Conduct neighborhood assessments** to identify opportunities for and barriers to active living. *For a walkability and bikeability assessment checklist, go to:*
  Walkability: http://www.walkableamerica.org/checklist-walkability.pdf
  Bikeability: http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/pdf/bikabilitychecklist.pdf
  General: http://www.activelivingresearch.org/node/10616

Acknowledgments and Key Resource Links:

Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership Resources:

- ☐ Strategies for Enhancing the Built Environment to Support Healthy Eating and Active Living
- ☐ Promising Strategies for Creating Healthy Eating and Active Living Environments

Prevention Institute http://www.preventioninstitute.org/nutrition.html
Active Living by Design http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/
Washington State http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/NutritionPA/our_communities/default.htm
North Carolina ACEs: http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/ACEs/ACEs.html