SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults

AN ACTION GUIDE

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Diabetes Management

- *Diabetes Self-Management Education (DSME): Establishing a Community-Based DSME Program for Adults with Type 2 Diabetes to Improve Glycemic Control—An Action Guide*

Physical Activity

- *Places for Physical Activity: Facilitating Development of a Community Trail and Promoting Its Use to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults—An Action Guide*

- *School-Based Physical Education: Working with Schools to Increase Physical Activity Among Children and Adolescents in Physical Education Classes—An Action Guide*

- *Social Support for Physical Activity: Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults—An Action Guide*

Tobacco-Use Treatment

- *Healthcare Provider Reminder Systems, Provider Education, and Patient Education: Working with Healthcare Delivery Systems to Improve the Delivery of Tobacco-Use Treatment to Patients— An Action Guide*

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Partnership for Prevention® is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing illness and injury and promoting health. Partnership's programs reach policy makers, a wide range of public health and healthcare professionals, businesses, and others who can emphasize prevention.

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Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

The Community Health Promotion Handbook: Action Guides to Improve Community Health is an important tool, composed of five Action Guides, that translates evidence-based recommendations into the necessary "how to" guidance for implementation of effective community-level health promotion strategies. Although *The Community Health Promotion Handbook* is designed primarily to assist public health practitioners in implementing evidence-based practices, additional audiences who may benefit from using this resource include local planners, advocates, policy makers, community and business leaders, community-based organizations, educators, healthcare providers, and others interested in improving health in their communities.

The Community Health Promotion Handbook was developed through a collaborative effort between Partnership for Prevention®—a national membership organization dedicated to building evidence of sound disease prevention and health promotion policies and practices and advocating their adoption by public and private sectors—and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These implementation guidelines have emerged from the experiences of the 40 communities supported by CDC's Steps Program, which is creating models for how local communities can act to address chronic diseases. The Steps Program's current focus areas are obesity, diabetes, and asthma, as well as the related risk factors of physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use.

All five Action Guides are based on specific health promotion recommendations from *The Guide to Community Preventive Services* (*Community Guide*), which is published by the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. This independent decision-making body makes recommendations for the use of various public health interventions on the basis of the evidence of effectiveness gathered in the rigorous and systematic scientific reviews of published studies. Although these recommendations advise on "what to do," they do not provide the guidance needed to successfully take the interventions "from the page to the field." Partnership for Prevention and CDC have worked together to bridge this gap between research and practice by developing *The Community Health Promotion Handbook*.

This Action Guide focuses on a specific approach for implementation of its related *Community Guide* recommendation. When selecting among effective interventions to improve health outcomes, you should first assess your resources and health priorities. After this up-front analysis is completed and this approach is deemed appropriate and viable for your community's needs, this Action Guide can be used to facilitate your activities.

Boston Steps' NeighborWalk Program

The information within this Action Guide is intended to be generalizable to a range of communities, but you will need to determine what modifications may be necessary to meet your local health objectives. Rather than a prescriptive list of required actions, general steps and suggestions are provided in this guide to accommodate the unique aspects of communities and their resources. This Action Guide should be used along with technical assistance offered by experienced organizations, local or state health experts, public health program managers, researchers, or others with relevant expertise.

Introduction

Information in this Action Guide is organized under the following sections and appendixes:

- **Section 1: Overview of the Approach**
  This section provides information on the *Community Guide*'s recommendation and the supporting evidence, presents the specific approach used in this Action Guide, describes expected outcomes from implementing the approach, and suggests a role for the reader that both is feasible and maximizes the ability to effect change.

- **Section 2: Implementing the Approach**
  This section of the Action Guide provides the bulk of implementation guidance by addressing the "who," "what," "when," "where," and "how" of the activities. Key stakeholders you may want to engage are listed within this section, as well as their related interests and potential roles as partners. Action steps are laid out to follow a general progression, from *Getting Started* to *Moving Forward* to *Looking Beyond.* Although the action steps are numbered to suggest an order of activity you might consider, in practice, many steps will likely occur simultaneously or may occur in a sequence different from what appears in this Action Guide.

- **Appendix A: Determining Your Resource Needs**
  Personnel, material, and financial resources that may be needed to successfully plan, implement, and sustain the approach are suggested here. You must determine what resources are necessary, ways to obtain those resources, and their costs. In the personnel resources subsection, a table presents a summary of tasks to allocate or assign among the main individuals and groups involved. The material and financial resources subsections each contain a list of items to consider based on the activities described in this Action Guide.

- **Appendix B: Evaluating Your Activities**
  Evaluation is a crucial component of public health practice and should begin to be addressed during the planning stage. Although it is outside the scope of this Action Guide to provide specific guidance on how to conduct an evaluation, this appendix does provide questions to help you collect data for process and outcome evaluations. Potential sources of data relevant to the approach are also included.

- **Appendix C: References and Resources**
  Here you will find a list—by topic—of references used in the development of this Action Guide and resources that provide information on similar approaches; tools for planning, implementation, and evaluation; and general guidance.

Overview of the Approach

The Evidence

Research has shown that social support can be an important influence on an individual's overall health and well-being. It arises from social networks and relationships in social settings outside the family that provide help in coping, managing stress, and changing behaviors such as increasing physical activity. These social networks, which may be newly created or preexisting, foster group cohesiveness and interpersonal bonding between members. Social support can be instrumental (providing direct assistance), informational (sharing knowledge about resources), emotional (demonstrating concern, encouragement, or affection), or appraising (providing feedback).

The Task Force on Community Preventive Services (TFCPS) recommends that interventions that build, strengthen, or maintain social support be implemented in community settings to increase physical activity. This recommendation is based on strong evidence of effectiveness found through a systematic review of published studies conducted by a team of experts on behalf of the TFCPS. Information on their recommendation, published in *The Guide to Community Preventive Services: What Works to Promote Health?* (*Community Guide*), is presented in Table 1 on page 4. Related publications by the TFCPS and reviews by other organizations are listed under "Evidence-Based Reviews of Social Support to Increase Physical Activity" in Appendix C: References and Resources.

The Approach

This Action Guide focuses on assisting local public health practitioners in increasing physical activity among young people and adults through the following approach: **establishing a community-based walking group program to increase social support of individuals wanting to improve their health and activity habits**. On the basis of an assessment of their resources and community's needs, public health practitioners committed to increasing physical activity among members of their community may find this approach to be appropriate and viable.

Expected Outcomes

Communities that successfully establish one or more walking group programs can expect to see the following results:

- The companionship, support, and encouragement offered to participants through these networks will lead to increased knowledge about physical activity and confidence in the ability to exercise.
- Length and frequency of physical activity will increase, and overall physical fitness will improve for men and women, people of all ages, and both sedentary and previously active individuals.

Implementing this approach can be useful in addressing physical activity and fitness objectives of the national Healthy People 2010 initiative, such as 1) increasing the proportion of people engaged in moderate or vigorous physical activity and 2) increasing the proportion of trips made by walking.

Your Role

As a public health practitioner, your role in building, strengthening, and maintaining social support for physical activity will depend on the needs of your community and the resources and capacity you have to establish a community-based walking group program. Setting up and sustaining an effective walking group program requires thorough planning and organization; therefore, one option for you to consider is to facilitate program planning and coordinate program activities. **The role of program coordinator is the focus of this Action Guide.**

Table 1: Highlights of *Community Guide*'s Recommendation

Recommendation

Social Support Interventions for Physical Activity in Community Settings—Strong Evidence of Effectiveness

Findings

These interventions build, strengthen, and maintain social networks that support increases in physical activity. New social networks can be created or existing networks in social settings outside the family, such as the workplace, can be used. Typically, participants set up a buddy system and make contracts to guarantee that both buddies will be active, or they form walking groups or other groups to provide companionship and support while being physically active.

Effectiveness

- Social support increased time spent in activity by approximately 44%.
- Frequency of exercise increased by approximately 20%.
- Aerobic capacity increased by approximately 5%.
- Participation in these programs improved fitness levels, lowered percentage of body fat, increased knowledge about exercise, and improved confidence in the ability to exercise.

Applicability

These finding should be generally applicable for people of all ages and levels of activity, and in diverse settings, if the programs are adapted to the people participating in them.

Additional Considerations

TFCPS found no barriers to implementing social support in community settings to promote physical activity.

Source

Excerpts taken from Task Force on Community Preventive Services. *The Guide to Community Preventive Services: What Works to Promote Health?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2005:94–96. Available at: http://www.thecommunityguide.org/library/book (Chapter 2: Physical Activity).

Implementing the Approach

Table 2 summarizes the action steps that are recommended for successfully establishing a walking group program in your community. The numbering of action steps is meant only to suggest an order of activity you might consider; in practice, there is no exact order to the steps—many steps will likely occur simultaneously or may occur in a sequence different from what appears in this Action Guide. In addition, the timeline for completing each step is highly dependent on a community's particular circumstances. Use this Action Guide to inform and direct your activities, making sure to seek additional technical assistance with your efforts and realizing that you will need to determine how these steps best fit your community.

Table 2: Action Steps for Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults

Getting Started

- Action Step 1— Canvass your community to determine the fit of your potential walking group program within current community activities.
- Action Step 2— Begin organizing the human, material, and financial resources that you will need for establishing a walking group program.
- Action Step 3— Engage existing partners and key stakeholders by informing them about your plans to develop a walking group program and educating them about its benefits.
- Action Step 4— Bring together committed partners and stakeholders in the form of a core team to oversee the walking group program, and begin planning for the evaluation component.
- Action Step 5— Recruit individuals to serve as walking leaders.
- Action Step 6— Work with your core team to establish goals for participation and total number of walking groups.
- Action Step 7— Train walking leaders.
- Action Step 8— Select, map, and measure potential walking routes in your community with help from walking leaders.

Moving Forward

- Action Step 9— Collaborate with your core team and walking leaders to review and refine your program evaluation activities.
- Action Step 10— Create a registration/welcome kit for walkers.
- Action Step 11— Publicize the walking group program throughout the community to raise awareness and attract participants.
- Action Step 12— Organize a kick-off event and walk to launch the program.
- Action Step 13— After walking groups begin meeting, encourage walking leaders to focus on maximizing social support for physical activity among participants and to be creative in maintaining each group's interest.

Looking Beyond

- Action Step 14— Organize other relevant social activities in addition to regularly scheduled walking sessions.
- Action Step 15— Maintain an active link between walking groups and other activities in your community to increase program visibility and to ensure that participants feel connected to a bigger movement.
- Action Step 16— Provide ongoing support to walking leaders and continue working with them to improve program performance.
- Action Step 17— Work with your core team in applying walking group program experience to overall community development and improvement activities.

Section 2—Implementing the Approach

Boxes marked with this lightbulb icon present tips, ideas, and additional information on implementing an action step and may also provide Web site links to helpful resources.

Boxes marked with this hurdler icon describe possible obstacles that may occur during implementation and offer suggestions for successfully overcoming those hurdles.

Getting Started

As you progress through the steps in this Action Guide, you may wish to consult experienced organizations—such as the ones noted here—for additional information about implementing a walking group program.

- America Walks is a national coalition of pedestrian advocacy groups devoted to promoting walking and improving conditions for walking in communities throughout the United States. Member groups range from statewide task forces to grassroots neighborhood organizations. Visit their Web site for tools and resources at http://www.americawalks.org.

- Boston Steps' NeighborWalk in Massachusetts and Sound Steps™ Walking Program in Seattle, Washington, are examples of community-based programs promoting walking groups among residents. Obtain more information about these active programs at http://www.bphc.org/neighborwalk and http://www.seattle.gov/parks/Seniors/SoundSteps.htm.

- California Center for Physical Activity has produced a tool kit entitled *How to Start a Walking Program: A Guide for Local Program Coordinators,* which is available at http://www.caphysicalactivity.org/walkkit. The Center's projects—all of which include a walking component—involve helping communities to create more walkable and bikeable neighborhoods and to establish community-based physical activity programs.

- Healthy Aging Partnership developed the Sound Steps™ Walking Program, which uses walking groups to encourage sedentary older adults to be more physically active. Subsequently, an online tool kit was released to enable replication of the program by other groups. This tool kit is available at http://www.chef.org/resources/sstk.php.

- National Center for Safe Routes to School offers an online *Safe Routes to School Guide* for implementing "walking school bus" programs in which groups of children walk to school with one or more supervising adults. Benefits include opportunities for socializing, increased time spent in physical activity, and an improved sense of community. The guide is available at http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/walking_school_bus/index.cfm.

■ **Action Step 1**—**Canvass your community to determine the fit of your potential walking group program within current community activities.** Through this exercise you may discover potential allies or partners for your work.

➤ Arrange interviews with staff of existing walking group programs serving your community (if any) to find out about their programs, including what types of activities are offered, how many people attend which activities and how often, and participant demographics. Also find out what they would like to see done in the community with respect to walking group programs that has not yet happened. Identify other community-based health and physical activity programs and ask their staff how a walking group program could complement their current offerings.

Section 2—Implementing the Approach

■ **Action Step 2**—Begin organizing the human, material, and financial resources that you will need for establishing a walking group program.

➤ Refer to Appendix A: Determining Your Resource Needs for information on personnel, material, and financial resources that may be needed to successfully plan, implement, and sustain the program. Make these determinations during the upcoming action steps as you establish the scope of your activities.

■ **Action Step 3**—Engage existing partners and key stakeholders by informing them about your plans to develop a walking group program and educating them about its benefits.

➤ Success in implementing this approach will depend on forming good relationships with various stakeholders who are invested in walking groups and social support for physical activity. Certain partners and stakeholders may be key decision makers whose influence within and understanding of the community are essential throughout program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Types of stakeholders that you may choose to partner with are listed in Table 3. Some communities may have many stakeholders and others may have only a few. When deciding how to engage different types of stakeholders, consider the potential role that each can and will want to play on the basis of their interests relating to physical activity.

Table 3: Stakeholders' Related Interests and Their Possible Roles as Partners		
Stakeholders	**Related Interests**	**Roles as a Partner**
Community residents	■ Increased opportunities for physical activity that are at convenient times and locations ■ Increased social support for physical activity ■ Better health	■ Participate in walking groups, including as walking leaders ■ Help promote the program ■ Advocate improvements in walkability of community routes
Neighborhood associations	■ Increased opportunities for positive engagement of neighborhood residents	■ Notify members of program opportunities ■ Suggest neighborhood walking routes and provide maps of routes
Community organizations, health programs, schools, and faith-based institutions	■ Increased opportunities for physical activity ■ Increased opportunities for positive engagement of community residents	■ Provide access to a wide base of community residents ■ Provide meeting locations and structure for individual walking groups ■ Donate supplies or materials (e.g., refreshments) ■ Coordinate walking group logistics
Pedestrian and other advocacy groups	■ Increased opportunities for physical activity ■ Creation and preservation of safe walking environments	■ Build program support through promotion ■ Assist with determining walkability of community routes
Community leaders	■ Community health promotion ■ Recognition for role in supporting the program	■ Provide resources to support the program ■ Help to promote the program

Table 3: Stakeholders' Related Interests and Their Possible Roles as Partners, cont'd		
Stakeholders	**Related Interests**	**Roles as a Partner**
Employers	▪ Improved employee health and productivity resulting from regular physical activity	▪ Promote the program and provide incentives to employees participating in walking groups
Local businesses	▪ Strong community relationships ▪ Promotion of products and services	▪ Contribute donations to support program (e.g., incentive items such as coupons and t-shirts) ▪ Sponsor community walking events
Local media (television, radio, newspaper, Internet)	▪ News coverage of local issues ▪ Public service announcements	▪ Inform the public about the walking group program and promote its use
Healthcare providers	▪ Improved patient health	▪ Refer patients who are overweight or at risk for cardiovascular disease to the program ▪ Donate walking supplies (e.g., heart rate monitors, pedometers)
Local and state health departments	▪ Improved public health	▪ Provide resources and leadership ▪ Contribute data on benefits of physical activity
Government departments concerned with parks, recreation, and transportation	▪ Recreational opportunities for community residents	▪ Provide maps of viable community walking routes ▪ Ensure that routes are safe and well maintained
Law enforcement agencies	▪ Safety and protection of community residents	▪ Offer guidance on safe routes in community ▪ Ensure safety of routes

➤ After you have identified key stakeholders in your community, determine the best way to educate these individuals and groups about your plans. For example, you might decide to invite them to an informational session about the walking group program you hope to establish. Also consider offering information at local health promotion events about the positive effects of social support for increasing physical activity and how a community-based walking group approach can benefit the community. Continue to communicate these benefits throughout your ongoing activities.

▪ **Action Step 4—Bring together committed partners and stakeholders in the form of a core team to oversee the walking group program, and begin planning for the evaluation component.** The core team makes decisions relating to the scope and design of the community-based walking group program.

➤ Ensure that team members reach consensus on program goals and understand the concept of social support and how it can improve participation in physical activity.

Section 2—Implementing the Approach

➤ Identify people with experience in program planning, implementation, and evaluation who may be able to serve in leadership roles on your core team. Appendix A: Determining Your Resource Needs provides you with a basic list of core team tasks that are identified in the action steps of this guide.

➤ Start to draft an evaluation plan with the core team for assessing your program and the outcomes of using this community-based walking group approach to increase participants' physical activity. Action Step 9 addresses the need to review and refine your evaluation activities when you have entered the "moving forward" stage. Although specific guidance on conducting an evaluation is outside the scope of this Action Guide, you will find information within this guide to help you prepare for and develop an evaluation plan. Review Appendix B: Evaluating Your Activities for the types of questions to ask to guide you in gathering process and outcome data for program evaluation needs. Refer also to "Resources for Developing an Evaluation Plan" in Appendix C: References and Resources.

➤ Beginning early on, convene regularly-scheduled core team meetings to plan upcoming activities. The core team can be instrumental in planning promotional activities for the program, as well as securing sponsorship and donations from the business community. As you move forward, remember to keep team members regularly informed and updated on progress.

■ **Action Step 5—Recruit individuals to serve as walking leaders.**

➤ Develop a walking leader position description to post on community bulletin boards and to submit to local newspapers.

> An example of a walking leader position description that can be modified to meet your requirements is available in the Sound Steps™ Walking Program Toolkit at http://www.chef.org/resources/sstk.php#leader.

➤ Distribute flyers at health fairs and fitness expos, and place advertisements and press releases in various media outlets. Recruit leaders from local fitness centers or other exercise venues. Look to your stakeholders for leads on potential walking leaders.

➤ Plan to interview and thoroughly investigate candidates to ensure a good fit. Walking leaders should enjoy walking and physical activity in general, and they should be attentive, punctual, able to motivate others, and willing to commit to the ideals and objectives of your program. The best walking leaders may be residents of your community who are very familiar with a particular neighborhood or walking area.

➤ Encourage walking leaders to commit to their position for a specific period of time. Depending on your program, this may be a season, six months, or a year. Recognize, however, that other leaders may emerge naturally in walking groups over time. Walking leaders should understand that their role is one that can be shared, and they may want to identify other natural leaders within their groups.

➤ If funding permits, consider making this a paid position or offering individual walking leaders a stipend.

Section 2—Implementing the Approach

■ **Action Step 6**—**Work with your core team to establish goals for participation and total number of walking groups.**

➤ Set a realistic goal for participation. Use this goal and characteristics of your community to make decisions about the number of walking groups. These decisions can help inform many of your future activities, particularly program promotion and participant recruitment. Try to keep this goal reasonable because too many groups and participants may drain the energies of program staff and walking leaders. It is better to focus on small numbers until the program is well developed.

➤ Consider setting up walking groups within neighborhoods. Walking leaders can run groups on the basis of where they live. Neighborhood-based groups allow participants to become better acquainted with neighbors and characteristics of their neighborhood. Additionally, close proximity makes it easier for neighbors to call on one another for encouragement and support. You may want to give higher priority to neighborhoods showing the most enthusiasm for your program, a sense of which you may get after you begin engaging stakeholders. After you have a successful walking group in one neighborhood, it will be easier to replicate the model in a more challenging location.

> Walking group participation may be limited by time constraints faced by community members. People often avoid physical activity because they think it can't be fit into their daily routines. Neighborhood-based walking groups can minimize travel time to designated meeting points, thereby allowing more time for other daily activities.

➤ Consider linking your walking group program with existing organizations to enhance community awareness and yield greater participation. For example, faith-based institutions and other community-based groups can recruit individuals and also offer their facilities as a base for participants to meet before and after each walk. Community-based health (e.g., diabetes, tobacco-use cessation, cardiac) and physical activity programs may be interested in promoting your walking group program to their participants. Some schools may even have school tracks that can be used as walking routes.

■ **Action Step 7**—**Train walking leaders.** Refer to Table 4 on the next page for a checklist of items to cover when training walking leaders.

Walking leaders should be trained to do the following:

➤ Provide information to participants on the benefits of physical activity and the rationale for your program by presenting the concept of social support and how it can improve participation in physical activity. Discuss ideas for increasing social support with participants (e.g., walking buddies, reminder e-mails).

> For more information on physical activity trends and benefits, visit CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Web site at http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/index.htm.

➤ Offer participants basic information on physical activity fundamentals (e.g., checking pulse rate, selecting proper active attire, monitoring fluid intake).

➤ Respond in the case of an emergency. Call for medical assistance if someone is injured. Watch for signs of overexertion such as unsteadiness, dizziness, cramping, significant breathlessness, or excessive sweating, and ask any individual with initial signs to slow down or stop.

> Contact the American Red Cross and the American Heart Association for local courses on first aid and CPR. First aid, safety, and other tips can be found in the California Center for Physical Activity's *How to Start a Walking Program: A Guide for Local Program Coordinators* at http://www.caphysicalactivity.org/walkkit and in the *Walk Leader Training Manual* provided by the Government of Western Australia's Department of Sport and Recreation at http://catalogue.ausport.gov.au/fulltext/2004/wa/WalkLeaderTrainingManual.pdf.

➤ Alert participants to safety techniques and communications (e.g., whistles may be used to get their attention when crossing busy streets) and encourage them to look out for one another. Take all necessary safety precautions and share the following tips with participants: obey traffic signals and cross streets carefully, wear brightly colored clothing, carry "in case of emergency" phone numbers with them, and get to know the route.

> Participants may have particular safety concerns. Addressing these concerns should be given the highest priority during each walking session and throughout the program overall. For example, walks that originally took place in the daylight but now, due to seasonal changes, take place at least partly after dark may lose participants. Consider bringing flashlights or rescheduling these walks for an earlier hour.

➤ Lead participants through warm-up and cool-down routines. An illustration of some stretching exercises can also be found in the two manuals cited in the preceding tip box.

Table 4: Checklist of Critical Items to Cover When Training Walking Leaders
☑ Walking leader roles and responsibilities (e.g., recording attendance)
☑ Effective leadership (e.g., motivating others)
☑ Walking techniques (e.g., fitness walking, walking with weights)
☑ Team-building strategies (e.g., establishing a team name for the walking group)
☑ Tips for minimizing participant turnover (e.g., offering incentives)
☑ Issues for individuals with disabilities (e.g., using accessible walking routes)
☑ Safety
☑ Emergency response
☑ Risk management (the process of developing strategies to reduce the risk of potentially harmful incidents such as injury resulting from a fall)
☑ First aid, including CPR

Section 2—Implementing the Approach

■ **Action Step 8—Select, map, and measure potential walking routes in your community with help from walking leaders.**

➤ Rely on stakeholders (such as neighborhood associations, local pedestrian-related groups, and local government departments concerned with parks, recreation, and transportation), other core team members, walking leaders, and your own familiarity with the community when selecting potential walking routes. Consult with these groups and individuals to determine whether or not there are existing maps detailing walking routes in your community. If not, you may be able to develop route maps with their assistance. If specific demographic groups—identified on the basis of community health objectives—will be encouraged to join the walking group program, determine walking locations that could help to especially draw these residents.

➤ Walk routes in advance. Time these walks. Determine potential meeting places near each route, as well as the location of parking and restroom facilities. When selecting routes, be mindful of important features such as safety, accessibility for individuals with disabilities, adequate lighting, maintenance, and traffic patterns. The routes' walkability (i.e., the extent to which walking is readily available as a safe, connected, accessible, and pleasant mode of transportation) should be assessed. A walkability checklist is available from the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center at http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=12 to gauge the quality of your routes.

If you find walking routes that have safety issues, contact local government departments concerned with parks, recreation, and transportation to encourage that enhancements be made to improve walkability. Also consider developing a trail in a convenient location to provide a new opportunity for physical activity. Refer to another Action Guide in *The Community Health Promotion Handbook*, entitled *Places for Physical Activity: Facilitating Development of a Community Trail and Promoting Its Use to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults*, for information on how to make it happen (http://www.prevent.org/actionguides).

Some neighborhoods may be unsafe for regular walks because of factors such as high crime rates or too much traffic. To facilitate involvement of these neighborhood residents in your walking group program, consider earmarking funds for the use of carpool vans that can transport participants to areas more suitable for walks.

➤ Select a variety of routes having different lengths and degrees of difficulty. Consider establishing a difficulty grade for each route. Focus on routes that begin and end at the same location. A loop formation allows individuals to set their own pace and easily find their way back to the starting point. Remember that after walking groups are underway, participants may want to collaborate in selecting new routes.

Section 2—Implementing the Approach

Sustainability Tip: A year-round, all-weather program may increase motivation and minimize participant dropout. Select, in advance, alternative walking locations—such as shopping malls, indoor tracks, or auditoriums—that can be used when there is inclement weather or it is too hot or cold for comfortable outdoor walking. Such preparation may offset the influence of seasonal changes and bad weather on walking group participation rates and help to establish your program. Read about how school facilities are being used for walking during winter months in *Enhanced Access to Places for Physical Activity* at http://www.maine-nutrition. org/Resources_and_Links/PANPackets.htm.

Moving Forward

Now that you have engaged stakeholders, formed a core team, recruited and trained walking leaders, and selected walking routes, what's next? Look at the activities outlined below to gain insight into how to move forward.

■ **Action Step 9—Collaborate with your core team and walking leaders to review and refine your program evaluation activities.**

➤ Complete the development of your evaluation plan that was begun in Action Step 4, even though you may need to continue to refine certain aspects as the program progresses. As discussed earlier in Action Step 4, review Appendix B: Evaluating Your Activities for the types of questions to ask to guide you in gathering process and outcome data for program evaluation needs. Refer also to "Resources for Developing an Evaluation Plan" in Appendix C: References and Resources.

■ **Action Step 10—Create a registration/welcome kit for walkers.** It can include various materials such as a registration form, pamphlets discussing the benefits of walking and other types of physical activity, illustrations of recommended stretching exercises from the walking leaders' training, a name tag, a walking log, a participant waiver and release form, a pre-program assessment form(s) for evaluation needs, and healthy snacks.

➤ Prepare a registration form to capture vital information on potential participants. Consider using this form to collect general demographics and contact information, emergency contact information, weekly availability for walks, and reasons for participation.

Baseline data from pre-program assessment questions can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program over time. For example, you may want to generate a baseline understanding of participants' health by including questions about self-rated health status and type and frequency of current physical activity. Data to be collected can be requested on the registration form or a separate pre-program assessment form(s) can be created for participants to fill out.

Section 2—Implementing the Approach

➤ Create a walking log that is simple for participants to use. A walking log is a record of walking activities that enables people to track progress over time by documenting the number of steps taken and the time and distance walked.

➤ Consider using a waiver and release form, signed by a participant as part of registration, to help protect walking leaders and sponsoring organization(s) from liability should injuries or other mishaps occur during walks.

When developing your registration and welcome materials, look at examples from the following organizations and also the organizations mentioned in the next action step:

■ California Center for Physical Activity's "Walk Kit" for walking groups, available at http://www.caphysicalactivity.org/resources/walkkit.html, includes a walking log and a questionnaire on readiness for physical activity.

■ Steps to a Healthier Salinas' "Walking Group Tool Kit," available at http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/health/CommunityHealth/Steps/WalkingGroup.htm, includes an invitation flyer, sign-up sheet, liability waiver, and progress chart.

■ **Action Step 11—Publicize the walking group program throughout the community to raise awareness and attract participants.**

➤ Develop promotional materials such as posters and flyers to be distributed throughout the community (e.g., at faith-based institutions, schools, community centers, ethnic centers, senior centers, supermarkets, libraries, PTA meetings, healthcare centers, fitness centers, and pharmacies). Consider distributing flyers to all residences along walking routes or working with utility companies to include them with bill mailings. Include a registration form in your promotional material, which can be filled out and returned by mail, e-mail, or fax.

Sound Steps™ Walking Program Toolkit provides ideas on how to recruit participants, including examples of promotional and advertising materials, at http://www.chef.org/resources/sstk.php#recruiting.

➤ Ensure that registration forms are placed in multiple locations—including your selected route sites—during the registration period. There may be a central location along each route where forms can be safely deposited and stored. Program staff can then periodically collect these for processing.

➤ Set up a Web page or Web site that details information about the program and provides contact information for reaching program staff by phone or e-mail. Publicize the Internet address in your promotional materials. Depending on your resources, give visitors the option to register online.

➤ Remember that if you want your program to attract males and females of all ages, cultural backgrounds, and fitness levels, you may need to tailor your promotional activities accordingly. Different groups may access different venues and may respond to different advertising methods.

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When recruiting participants for your walking group program, you may find that women are much more likely to participate than men. To balance participation, consider setting up all-male walking groups or offering incentives (e.g., water bottles, visors) for women to bring their spouses, boyfriends, or other male companions. Word-of-mouth can increase male involvement as well. One man in attendance at walking sessions may spread the word to other men.

➤ Involve healthcare providers. Ask physicians and other health professionals to recommend your walking group program to patients interested in or in need of physical activity opportunities. Also, they may be able to donate walking supplies (e.g., heart rate monitors, pedometers).

To help spread the word, consider developing "physical activity prescription pads" that have a preprinted description of your walking group program and contact information on them. When educating healthcare providers about your walking group program, you can provide them with these handy tear-off sheets for referring patients to your activities.

➤ Enlist local media (i.e., television, newspaper, radio, and Internet sources) to help with program promotion. The California Center for Physical Activity has prepared an example of a press release for a walking group program, available at http://www.caphysicalactivity.org/docs/walkkit/5-press_release.pdf.

Wheeling Walks in West Virginia, a comprehensive program to encourage walking among sedentary older adults, provides information about its outreach activities in its *Training Manual for a Media-Based Community Campaign for Walking*, available at http://www.wheelingwalks.org. The manual contains details about the campaign's television, radio, and print advertisements; public relations activities; and local public health activities and events; as well as numerous written materials used to promote the campaign.

For further suggestions on how to generate publicity for your walking group program, you can review the *Media Access Guide: A Resource for Community Health Promotion*, published by CDC's Steps Program, at http://www.cdc.gov/steps/resources/pdf/StepsMAG.pdf. Topic sections include instructions, tips, and templates for writing press releases, media advisories, and other media-related materials; methods for monitoring media coverage; and strategies for placing public service announcements (PSAs) and hosting press conferences.

➤ Use word-of-mouth to spread information about your program. Walking leaders can be helpful in recruiting participants, particularly from within their own neighborhoods or social networks.

➤ Work with the core team to continue promotional and participant registration activities as you move toward your program launch date. If you find that you are falling short of participation goals, you may need to strengthen your marketing campaign. Although your program has a specific start date, promotional materials should emphasize that individuals are encouraged to join walking groups at any time.

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- **Action Step 12—Organize a kick-off event and walk to launch the program.** This is an opportunity to assemble all walking leaders and potential participants from various parts of your community and to allow people to get acquainted with one another and the walking group program.

  ➤ Program promotion materials should include kick-off event details. To achieve maximum turnout, contact individuals who have submitted registration forms to let them know about the event. Encourage them to invite their friends and family members.

  ➤ Select a central route in your community for the kick-off walk. Invite community leaders to attend and participate in the walk.

  ➤ Distribute welcome kits and route maps to attendees. Maps should highlight walking group routes, note lengths and degrees of difficulty, and identify key locations such as rest areas and water fountains.

  ➤ Brief attendees on the walking group program and familiarize them with walking fundamentals. Clarify the role of walking leaders. Emphasize to attendees that ownership of walking groups rests with them and that their input will help refine the program. Later, as the kick-off event and walk comes to a close, attendees can meet with the leader(s) of the walking groups that they are interested in joining to learn more about each group's schedule and routes.

- **Action Step 13—After walking groups begin meeting, encourage walking leaders to focus on maximizing social support for physical activity among participants and to be creative in maintaining each group's interest.**

Walking leaders should be prepared to do the following:

➤ Welcome new participants at each walking session.

➤ Provide sign-in sheets at each walking session to record attendance. Attendance records over time will be useful when evaluating the effectiveness of your program.

➤ Provide all participants with name tags to build familiarity among group members.

➤ Create a team name to help establish a common group identity. Corporate sponsorship may help with the production and distribution of t-shirts or other attire emblazoned with the team name.

➤ Distribute contact lists and set up walking group phone trees to facilitate networking among participants in instances of sudden route change or cancellation due to inclement weather.

➤ Assist participants in arranging car pools if necessary to overcome transportation problems that may limit participation.

➤ Make weekly or biweekly phone calls, if possible, to each participant to check in, share walking session scheduling information, encourage attendance, and address any potential concerns that may limit involvement or lead to program drop-out.

➤ Send reminder e-mails notifying participants of upcoming meeting times and selected routes to help encourage attendance.

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➤ Offer incentives (e.g., water bottles, hats) to participants for bringing one or more friends to walking group sessions. People are less likely to abandon or postpone physical activity when a companion is present.

> Walking group participants may be successful in encouraging friends, neighbors, or even passersby encountered during walks to join, but you may want to try other approaches as well. Consider promoting the program through employers, who have a stake in the health and well-being of their staff, and persuading them to offer significant incentives to employees for participating in the walking group program.

➤ Work with participants in setting distance and time goals for each walking session and in determining chosen routes and the number of meeting times per week. Short surveys can help gauge preferences with respect to meeting times and locations. Encourage participants to maintain a walking log recording their progress. This record can serve as an incentive for continued participation and provide additional program evaluation data. An example of a walking log is available from the California Center for Physical Activity at http://www.caphysicalactivity.org/docs/walkkit/3-walking_log.pdf.

> Although walking leaders may choose to rely on participant input when making decisions about the length and frequency of walks, there are some guidelines that should help in planning. Try to schedule at least one walk per week and consider adding more sessions throughout the week so more people can participate. The timing of these walks may vary depending on people's interest. Many walking group programs offer walks ranging from 30 to 60 minutes in length and covering an average distance of approximately two miles.

➤ Diversify walking routes to keep sessions fresh and interesting for participants.

➤ Set aside time before and after each walk for warm-up and cool-down exercises, which not only help prevent injuries but also offer additional opportunities for participants to interact and be social.

➤ Re-emphasize to participants that it is their walk and they have ownership over the walking group. Engage them in making decisions about group guidelines and conduct (e.g., Should there be a ban on using headphones and cellular phones while walking? Can participants bring dogs?).

> Some participants may be intimidated by the physical activity capabilities of others in their group. They may think that the group moves too fast and therefore decide not to return. Ensure that at least one person keeps pace with those who are slower or too shy to reach out to others on their own. For large groups, it may be best to involve three leaders: one to walk at a fast pace, one at a medium pace, and one at a slower pace. Also consider designating pairs of individual walkers as buddies or encouraging walkers to find buddies on their own. Ask buddies to rely on one another for support.

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Looking Beyond

You and your core team have planned and successfully launched a walking group program in your community. Congratulations! But your work does not end here. As your program progresses, what steps should you take to maintain the momentum of your activities? Look at key strategies in the action steps below for suggestions.

■ **Action Step 14—Organize other relevant social activities in addition to regularly scheduled walking sessions.**

➤ Encourage walking leaders to engage in team-building exercises with participants to strengthen cohesiveness and increase investment in walking groups. One example might be group participation in an alternative physical activity program (e.g., an exercise or dance class at a neighboring fitness or recreational center). A second example might involve asking participants to identify local healthy eating establishments. The group can select one and arrange to go there for a meal or snack after a walk. Also consider planning picnics, potlucks, or monthly meetings with participants for additional social support.

➤ Arrange mileage challenges between different walking groups in which participants keep an accurate record of miles walked over a designated period of time. Award prizes and give recognition to the groups that reach certain markers first (e.g., 20 miles, 50 miles).

> Once the program gains ground, you may want to begin distributing incentives to walkers at regular intervals. Incentives such as heart rate monitors, pedometers, water bottles, hats, sweatshirts, or certificates of achievement can be used as rewards or to motivate continued participation.

■ **Action Step 15—Maintain an active link between walking groups and other activities in your community to increase program visibility and to ensure that participants feel connected to a bigger movement.**

➤ Offer diabetes and blood pressure screenings, workshops on fitness and healthy eating, and small health fairs to your participants and other community residents. In addition to promoting your walking group program, ask representatives from community-based organizations, the health department, and medical facilities within your community to lend a hand by sponsoring events, donating supplies, speaking on selected topics, or otherwise contributing their expertise.

➤ Coordinate theme walks, inviting multiple walking groups. These walks could be nature hikes or historical tours, or they could take place in an exciting location such as a nearby zoo. Alternatively, they may serve an intended purpose such as an evaluation of neighborhood and community walkability. You can use the walkability checklist available from the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center at http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=12 to gauge the quality, safety, and accessibility of your routes and other pedestrian facilities.

> Consider organizing large walking group sessions around charity walk-a-thons happening in or near your community.

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➤ Develop and distribute a monthly or bimonthly newsletter with information on upcoming walks and community events, newsworthy items pertaining to walking and general physical activity, strategies for maintaining a physical activity routine, human interest stories about participants, anecdotal support for walking groups, and program evaluation findings.

➤ Engage the media to publish human interest stories about the walking group program and its participants in local newspapers—publicity that may result in increased participation and help to recruit additional walking leaders.

> To garner good media coverage for your organization, you should first identify and make contact with the right media professionals and then provide them with compelling story angles. To help you and your staff initiate and grow media relationships in your community, review the suggestions in the "Media Access 101" section of the *Media Access Guide: A Resource for Community Health Promotion*, published by CDC's Steps Program, at http://www.cdc.gov/steps/resources/pdf/StepsMAG.pdf.

➤ Continue to encourage ownership of the walking group program by the participants and the community at large, which may contribute to its overall sustainability.

■ **Action Step 16—Provide ongoing support to walking leaders and continue working with them to improve program performance.**

➤ Convene regular meetings with walking leaders as a forum for problem solving and sharing of information about routes, group activities, attendance, participant progress, etc.

➤ Recognize walking leaders for their hard work and valuable contributions in aiding this program by giving them credit whenever possible. Highlight leader bios in newsletters. Offer incentives (e.g., gift certificates, magazine subscriptions) for continued motivation among walking leaders.

■ **Action Step 17—Work with your core team in applying walking group program experience to overall community development and improvement activities.**

➤ Provide feedback to local government departments concerned with parks, recreation, and transportation on the walkability of routes throughout the community. Identify problems that are related to sidewalks, crosswalks, timing of streetlights, and safety.

➤ Consider mass production and dissemination of neighborhood or community maps detailing walking routes for all residents. In doing this, you may expand the range of physical activity opportunities for all members of your community. Rely on support from local businesses, community-based organizations, and local government offices.

➤ Consider working with partners and stakeholders to promote the implementation of similar programs needed within your community and in other interested communities. As part of the dissemination process, share information about your program and related walking leader training materials, the walking routes and the methods used to assess and select them, and the lessons learned in establishing your program.

Appendix A
Determining Your Resource Needs

Use the following lists of personnel, material, and financial resource needs to guide your planning activities for establishing a community-based walking group program. Remember, the resources needed by the group you represent will depend on the scope of program activities and the depth of your group's involvement. Available funding will determine what personnel and material resources you are able to secure to supplement your existing resources.

■ Personnel Resource Needs

The personnel you will need to lead the activities associated with a community-based walking group program may include the following full-time or part-time staff and volunteers:

- A program coordinator to direct program planning and manage the program.
- Administrative staff to provide support to the program coordinator and walking leaders.
- Walking leaders to serve as facilitators for walking groups.
- A core team composed of committed partners and stakeholders to support the goals of the program.

Refer to Table 5 for a summary of the tasks that various personnel typically perform. An important function is determining who will be responsible for each activity. Some of these tasks may be interchanged between different people or groups when appropriate.

Table 5: Personnel and Their Typical Responsibilities
Program coordinator ■ Coordinates day-to-day programmatic activity ■ Helps to assemble the core team ■ Organizes and facilitates training of walking leaders ■ Develops materials for program promotion ■ Develops and maintains Web page or Web site, including related e-mail communications ■ Selects, maps, and measures routes with help from walking leaders and others ■ Plans program kick-off and other events ■ Works closely with the core team and walking leaders to troubleshoot problems and to decide how issues should be addressed ■ Ensures that program activities are evaluated and feedback is used to facilitate the ongoing program
Walking leaders ■ Attend training ■ Facilitate walks ■ Record attendance ■ Lead participants through warm-up and cool-down exercises ■ Meet regularly with program coordinator or staff for support and progress reports ■ Organize other events in addition to regularly scheduled walking sessions ■ Provide social support and check on participants regularly ■ Assist with program evaluation
Core team ■ Develops program scope, goals, and timeline ■ Plans program activities and promotional campaign ■ Assists with program evaluation ■ Solicits endorsement and sponsorship from the community (e.g., businesses, healthcare providers) ■ Contributes to community development and improvement activities

■ Material Resource Needs

You will need a variety of material resources throughout your walking group program's planning and implementation process. As you move forward with your activities, keep in mind ways you might help to acquire or develop some of these materials, using existing resources whenever possible. Basic material resource needs are detailed in the following list:

- Office space for staff
- Office equipment for conducting outreach and research (e.g., computers, printers, fax machine, copier, telephones)
- Meeting space, audiovisual equipment, and materials for core team and walking leaders
- "Welcome kit" materials for walking group participants
- Hard-copy materials for walking leaders (e.g., sign-in sheets, attendance records)
- Hard-copy and electronic promotional materials (e.g., flyers, registration forms)
- Items serving as participant incentives (e.g., pedometers, water bottles)
- Materials for interviews, surveys, and other modes of evaluation

■ Financial Resource Needs

General, administrative, and personnel costs are the primary expenses for which you will need funds to establish a walking group program in your community. Be sure to budget for all components of your activities, such as the following items:

- Personnel salaries and benefits
- Office overhead
- Office and audiovisual equipment and materials
- Purchase or development and printing of materials for program promotion, walking leader training, and participant welcome kits
- Walking leader training
- Program evaluation
- Items serving as participant incentives
- Telephone and Internet access for program use
- Web page or Web site development and maintenance
- Miscellaneous items such as refreshments during meetings

Appendix B
Evaluating Your Activities

Evaluation is a key component of your program and should be conducted before, during, and after program implementation. You can use evaluation data to plan community-specific programs, to assess the effectiveness of the implemented program in achieving its objectives, and to modify current activities where necessary for program improvement.

Evaluation data can also be used to keep stakeholders updated on the walking group program's progress; show participants the benefits of their active involvement in the program; describe the program when applying for or securing additional support through partner funding, grant opportunities, and other methods; and provide other community groups with information as they consider developing a walking group program of their own.

Although specific guidance on conducting an evaluation is outside the scope of this Action Guide, you will find suggested questions below to guide you in collecting data for process and outcome evaluations; the specific questions you ultimately develop will depend on the objectives you have set and will be unique to your program. Potential sources of data are also listed to help you answer these questions. In addition, refer to "Resources for Developing an Evaluation Plan" in Appendix C: References and Resources.

Questions to Guide Data Collection

■ Process Evaluation

To assess whether the program was implemented as intended, you will need to collect data on the quality and effectiveness of your activities. Questions helpful in this assessment include the following:

- How was the walking group program publicized? How were participants recruited?

- What recruitment strategies worked best?

- How many walkers signed up before program launch? How many showed up for walks?

- How many participants were engaging in physical activity before starting this program?

- Has the level of participation changed over time? Why did program dropouts decline to participate further in the program?

- How frequently does the program attract new participants?

- Are participants provided adequate information about the benefits of walking as a form of physical activity? Has knowledge of the benefits of physical activity increased?

- Do walking leaders address participants' needs and concerns?

- Do program staff members address walking leaders' needs and concerns?

- Does training adequately prepare walking leaders for their roles and responsibilities in the walking group program?

- Do participants use walking logs?

- Outside of scheduled walking sessions, what is the frequency of interaction between walking leaders and participants? What is the nature of this interaction?

- As a measure of social support, are buddies chosen or designated during walking sessions?

- Do walking leaders encourage participants? Do participants encourage one another?

■ **Outcome Evaluation**

To assess the program's influence and make recommendations for future program direction and improvement, you will need to collect data on the expected outcomes of using this walking group approach to increase participants' physical activity through social support. Although long-term health outcomes—such as reduced incidence of obesity—are hard to attribute to any one program, asking the following questions may help you determine whether this approach was successful:

■ How have physical activity habits among participants changed as a result of participation in the walking group program?

■ How many minutes per week do participants spend engaging in physical activity, and how has this changed over time?

■ What is the frequency of physical activity episodes among participants and how has this changed over time?

■ Do participants engage in other physical activities besides walking group sessions?

■ Has the walkability of your community (i.e., the extent to which walking is readily available as a safe, connected, accessible, and pleasant mode of transportation) improved as a result of program activities?

Potential Sources of Data

There are many ways to collect data on process and outcome evaluation indicators. The data you use should address and answer the questions outlined in your evaluation plan. You may need to develop data sources, or you may adapt data sources already in existence. The following partial list of data sources may help you get started:

■ Participant satisfaction surveys

■ Pre- and post-program physical activity and health status assessments

■ Interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups with participants and walking leaders

■ Observational records of walking group participants

■ Participant registration and attendance records

■ Participants' walking logs

■ Walkability checklists for routes

■ Minutes of core team and walking leaders meetings

Appendix C
References and Resources

Evidence-Based Reviews of Social Support to Increase Physical Activity

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User Feedback Form

1. **Please rate how much you agree with the following statements:**

   a) Information within this Action Guide is easy to understand   Yes   Somewhat   No

   b) Information within this Action Guide is easy to find   Yes   Somewhat   No

   c) Boxes marked with hurdler and light bulb icons provide
   practical and useful additional information   Yes   Somewhat   No

   d) I will use this Action Guide to help improve my community's health   Yes   Maybe   No

   e) I would recommend this Action Guide to others   Yes   Maybe   No

   Comments (continue on back if necessary):

2. **Is there any other information that you would like to have
   seen included in this Action Guide to assist with implementation?**   Yes (please describe below; continue on back if necessary)   No

3. **Which best describes your work setting?** [Nonprofit   For profit]

   Federal/State/Local Government Agency   Healthcare Setting   Community Organization

   Academic   Other (please specify)

4. **What is your position?**

5. **How did you hear about this Action Guide? (check all that apply)**

   Word of mouth   Newsletter   Web site   Conference   Direct Mailing   Other

   (please specify for all checked items)

6. **May we contact you for additional feedback? If yes, please provide information below.**

   Name: Daytime Phone Number: