Creating healthy places to **live, work**

and **play** across North Carolina

A report from the Fit Community Initiative
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The Fit Community Initiative

What happens when diverse coalitions of partners work together to help their communities become healthier places to live, work and play? In 2005, the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) aimed to find out. In response to a growing body of evidence showing that people have difficulty making healthy choices when their neighborhoods and communities lack safe, affordable and readily available opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity, HWTF partnered with Active Living By Design (ALBD) to create Fit Community. In addition, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina helped support the initial phases of the Fit Community designation program, and the North Carolina Division of Public Health provided the final year of funding for the entire initiative in 2011-2012. A designation and grant program, Fit Community was designed to recognize and reward community-based efforts to make healthy choices easier and more accessible.

Fit Community grant awards provided funding and technical assistance with the goal of increasing routine physical activity and/or healthy eating by focusing on policy and environmental change strategies in communities. Over a five-year period, Fit Community supported 38 municipal- and county-based partnerships, each receiving $60,000 over two years. These partnerships developed a range of interventions and implemented them in their project areas, which typically focused on community, school or work site settings.

In order to apply for grant funding, partnerships also participated in a self-assessment process to gauge existing efforts to support physical activity, healthy eating and tobacco use prevention across their communities, schools and workplaces. Community leaders, government officials and staff, businesses and non-profit organizations collaborated in the self-assessment process, which identified strengths and areas for improvement, and provided community partners with a tool to stimulate collaboration on broader issues including health, livability, equity and sustainability. Those who excelled in all categories received a three-year Fit Community designation award.

Fit Community designation award. Twenty-seven North Carolina communities earned this distinction between 2006 and 2011, including nine that received re-designation awards.

A key component of the Fit Community initiative included technical assistance (TA) from Active Living By Design. Designation and grant applicants, as well as recipients of the two-year grant awards, worked in consultation with ALBD, whose approaches included coaching; the provision of resources, education and training; and support for project planning and implementation. Assistance primarily occurred through regular telephone calls, e-mails, community site visits, annual grantee meetings and other methods offered on an as-needed basis.

ALBD’s 5P Community Action Model served as the framework for the grant projects as well as the designation application. The model calls for the coordination of five strategies—Preparation, Promotion, Programs, Policy and Physical Projects—in support of a community’s vision or goal. It is based on the assumption that the integration of multiple “P” strategies will be more likely to generate increased and sustained routine physical activity and healthy eating compared to strategies that are implemented in isolation (e.g., solely building a trail, offering a walking program or starting a community garden).

Each of the 5P strategies involves specific action steps. Preparation includes partnership development, assessment, generating resources and sustainability planning. Promotion involves targeted communication with residents and policy makers to raise awareness and build demand. Programs are organized groups of individuals to encourage routine physical activity and/or healthy eating. Policy strategies inform, influence and provide a foundation for the implementation of practices that support active living and healthy eating. Physical projects improve the community environment and/or remove existing barriers to routine physical activity and healthy eating.

This document summarizes Fit Community’s innovative initiative that helped generate changes in policies and environments in municipalities and counties across North Carolina between 2006 and 2012. It provides a rich array of stories and lessons learned from a variety of settings that can be used by community partners, funders and technical assistance providers engaged in similar work across the state and the nation. It also offers a variety of relevant resources from featured Fit Community grantees and designees.

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**5P Community Action Model**

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The Fit Community Initiative
GranT reCiPienTs

Phase i (2006 – 2008)
• Ashe County
• Duplin County
• Haywood County
• Mecklenburg County
• Pamlico County
• Sampson County

Phase ii (2007 – 2009)
• Ashe County
• Duplin County
• Haywood County
• Mecklenburg County
• Pamlico County
• Sampson County

Phase iii (2008 – 2010)
• Ashe County
• Duplin County
• Haywood County
• Mecklenburg County
• Pamlico County
• Sampson County

Phase iv (2009 – 2011)
• Ashe County
• Duplin County
• Haywood County
• Mecklenburg County
• Pamlico County
• Sampson County

Phase v (2010 – 2012)
• Ashe County
• Duplin County
• Haywood County
• Mecklenburg County

Designation reCiPienTs

City of Asheville (2006 and 2009)
Town of Black Mountain (2008)
Buncombe County (2010)
Town of Carrboro (2007)
Town of Cary (2007 and 2010)
Town of Charlotte (2008)
Town of Concord (2006 and 2009)
Town of Durham (2011)
City of Durham (2009)
Town of Edenton (2007)
City of Goldsboro (2009)
City of Greensboro (2008)
City of Jacksonville (2006)
City of Kings Mountain (2009)
Mebane County (2006 and 2010)
City of Mount Airy (2006 and 2009)
New Hanover County (2011)
Town of Mount Holly (2007)
City of Wilmington (2006 and 2009)
City of Winston-Salem (2010)
Fit Community Grant Projects: Case Studies and Highlights

Between 2006 and 2012, thirty-eight North Carolina communities implemented two-year, $60,000 Fit Community initiatives, which were segmented by various sources of matching funds and in-kind support. All grantees utilized the SP Community Action Model as an underlying framework for their work, but projects also tailored to meet the needs of each community’s unique situation. Often the work took shape in specific settings, where an opportunity to increase – and the true spirit of the initiative – focus and partnerships were in place or primed to begin. Fit Community projects tended to address a number of domains: parks, recreation and trail facilities; schools; pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure; gardens; and work sites. These community highlights and case studies provide examples for each domain as well as a variety of success stories from Fit Community initiatives across the state.

While Fit Community originated as an obesity prevention initiative, it did not provide direct funding to help individuals lose weight or reduce body mass index. Instead, projects and activities occurred in a broader context of community change, through efforts to create healthier places to live, work and play. Such community-based supports, in turn, helped individuals build healthy habits into their daily routines. For this reason, so many Fit Community stories – and the true spirit of the initiative – focus on the process of creating community change, which begins by collaborating, building stronger ties across all sectors of the community and envisioning a future that results in better health and quality of life for everyone.

Creating Community Change: Town of Faison - Faison Fosters Fitness

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Margaret Mead’s wisdom rings true in Faison, a small town of 900 residents in eastern North Carolina. Through two passionate citizens, a movement to improve health and quality of life across the community Their vision centered on the construction of a new state-of-the-art indoor recreation/wellness facility and an adjacent walking trail. While these facilities, completed in 2010, provided ample opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating that didn’t previously exist, they have also become a community building-ground that established the recreation commission to reflect the new health goals and changed its name to the Faison Recreation and Wellness Commission. Programs at the recreation/wellness center and trail reflect the commission’s broad goals and serve the entire community. In addition to support from the town, non-profit partners and local volunteers provide significant resources to maintain the many programs and expanded operating hours. Opportunities include walking clubs, healthy eating classes, low-impact exercise and other senior-focused programs, Zumba classes, basketball leagues, after-school programs, Meals on Wheels and more. Unstructured activities also occur throughout the day using fitness equipment and the gymnasium. Partners estimate there were 50 trail users daily, rain or shine, while the recreation/wellness center recruited nearly 400 members by the end of 2011 and continued to grow – confirming residents’ enthusiasm for these new resources. According to Mayor Elmer Flye, “There might have been skepticism at first, but even the skeptics came on board! I think everyone in town is really proud of what we’ve done.”

The ability to rely on surrounding and community assets has been a welcome change in this agricultural community where residents must often organize to protest unwanted, high-pollution land uses. In fact, the new recreation resources continue to serve more people and generate more community support. In addition, Faison has assisted other municipalities in understanding how to replicate such success within their own communities. Anne Taylor, Fit Community project director, Recreation and Wellness Commission member and another early advocate for the project, speaks with pride of the changes that have taken place as a result of the project. “While none of us could possibly have known what is what project has done for the town of Faison and the surrounding area.”

“What none of us could possibly have known is what this project has done for the town of Faison and the surrounding area...”
on what people think about changing the mindset can be sustained. A partnership is needed to maintain programming, generate positive publicity, align future funding opportunities and ensure that the project is protected. Partnership is needed to maintain programming, generate positive publicity, align future funding opportunities and ensure that the project can be sustained.

**HIGHLIGHTED COMMUNITY: HAYWOOD COUNTY**

A semi-natural trail was built in the Rough Creek Watershed. The town of Canton dedicated it as an outdoor recreation area and agreed to provide future maintenance for the trail. Community partners worked with state regulatory agencies to gain approval for the project, and agreed that placing a well-designed trail in the environment-sensitive area was an effective way to increase responsible use and community appreciation. The initiative sparked the formation of a new “Friends of the Trail” non-profit organization dedicated to improving stewardship and promotion of the trail.

**HIGHLIGHTED COMMUNITY: CITY OF GOLDSBORO**

Stonecreek Park in Goldsboro received a new natural play area with climbing boulders, a butterfly garden and walking paths using signs to promote learning and active play, helping the community to leverage an additional $250,000 PART grant for future improvements and further establishing the park as an active play resource for children. In order to increase use of the park and build healthy habits among young children, Goldsboro and Wayne County partners reached out to several childcare facilities, inviting them to attend a series of special outdoor play events. They also worked directly with the facilities, helping staff adapt policies and practices to increase healthy eating and physical activity for children on a daily basis.

**Case Study: City of Burlington – North Park in Motion**

“We wanna dance,” school-aged girls at North Park told partners from Burlington Parks and Recreation Department, the Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Program and the HighlighetTed Community. They initiated the North Park in Motion branding campaign and a new walking club – helped create buzz. Community members took note and expressed a need for outdoor exercise equipment, bike racks and a water fountain in the park. The partnership also addressed these needs. Mary Faucette of Burlington’s Parks and Recreation Department, said this “circle of listening... and then responding to the need” is a key factor in upgrading North Park’s quality and boosting park use among residents.

Collaborating partners knew that the sustainability of their efforts depended on building a core of resident support for the vision for North Park. They initiated the North Park Leadership Advisory Board, eventually to be led by community members. Walking club participants were the first resident recruits, and from there the group’s momentum built to develop its own capacity. Regular meetings, formal and informal communication processes, and a community-wide training weekend led by VISIONS, Inc., strengthened the board’s ability to collaborate effectively and work toward common goals. Building a community-led partnership that could outlast the grant funding was important because, as Healthy Alamance Director April Durr commented, “The grant ended in July 2010, and that was when most of the work was really getting started.”

Since then, the Leadership Advisory Board has continued to grow and develop into a strong and diverse base of local champions for the park that now includes a Burlington City Council member. In turn, the board has driven North Park’s continued transformation into a vital hub of community interaction. On any weekday, a visitor can find dance classes for children and adults, after-school activities featuring dance arcade videos, air hockey and other active games, and FamilyPath Boys Club with basketball courts in common use. On weekends, the walking trail and exercise equipment are used during daytime and evening hours, and walking clubs are ongoing. In June 2011 – almost a year after the Friends of North Park partnered – the added a block-produce walk, standing resident purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from a local farm.

Another valuable change has taken place at North Park since the start of the initiative – an increasingly positive perception among a broad range of observers, from local merchants and city council members to William Gatts, director of the Mayco Bigelow Community Center, commented, “We’re changing the mindset on what people think about North Park. There are good things being said, and I’m always listened. I overheard someone say [at a large retail store], ‘I don’t go to North Park.’ And the lady with her said, ‘Well you ought to, that’s where I’ve been all the time going out. And that’s the only way to change a stereotype.’”

In so many ways, North Park is in motion. Girls at the park no longer report having nothing to do; they are not too busy dancing. The park is changing, and local media coverage is now focusing on the potential for change. The partnership evolved from its agency-driven roots to community led and, while small and large changes previously thought impossible have attracted new partners and contributed to ongoing success. Gatts added, “Eventually, Gatts would like to see the community-centric board take ownership of the park, so that residents’ vision for continued enhancements can be included in the city’s capital improvement plans. And with the momentum this initiative only growing stronger; North Park’s future certainly looks promising.
Schools

Schools rank high among children’s most formative environmental influences. Building routine physical activity and healthy eating into the school day can help youth establish and maintain good habits early in life, while also contributing to improved academic performance and decreasing disciplinary actions. Regular physical education means exercise (ninety-minute activity periods during the day) as well as healthy foods in cafeterias, vending machines and classroom celebrations. Areas of many schools can bolster students’ opportunities to learn and practice healthy behaviors. Broader community-based initiatives, such as efforts to increase safe ways to get to and from schools and increase access to fresh produce through gardens, also help shape and expand the landscape of options. Schools also serve as work sites and as community gathering places with the potential to influence students, parents and residents through joint-agreements that make school grounds and facilities available to the public after school hours.

Succeeding in school initiatives require close collaboration with administrators, teachers, staff and parents. Students also have a critical, often overlooked, leadership role, providing insights to effectively engage their peers. Students can lend an authentic advocacy voice in efforts to create community-wide change, and their participation in school board or town council meetings can provide opportunities for intergenerational learning.

**Case Study: Village of Pinehurst – Pinehurst Walks!**

“When we first started, it was just lines of cars and no safe way to get to Cannon Park or the village,” Project Director Melissa Murdock recalls. “It was frustrating for the health education specialists at Fort Bragg and the local Healthy Schools – coordinated a weekly walking school bus program to encourage routine school use. Parents could drop their children off at Cannon Park, knowing that adult volunteer supervisors would lead “busies” of young pedestrians to school. Students and parents embraced the new morning routine, and teachers noticed children started the day more alert and ready to learn. Parents worked intensively throughout the great period to make the efforts a success.

Personal passion for the work was one of the partnership’s key advantages. Led by a highly supportive and engaged principal and two community partners who were parents of children at the school, the project leaders had frequent personal interaction with students and parents, listening to the students and parents about issues ranging from incentives for participation to safety and incidence weather policies proved most effective to encourage participation. When partners observed lower participation among fourth and fifth grade students, conversations revealed a concern about the walking school bus as something for younger children. As a result, students were asked to define a leadership role for themselves. Project leaders supported the youth in writing “safe routes to school” mini-grant proposal to fund the idea, leading to greater participation among older children.

The sight of enthusiastic youth walking to school couldn’t help but attract attention and support from the entire community and contributions from additional partners added to the initiative’s momentum. One member of Pinehurst’s planning and zoning board became a walking school bus volunteer, generating a stronger advocacy for safe connections to school. The police department, initially reluctant about the initiative for fear of potential vehicle–pedestrian accidents, became involved after they witnessed huge traffic reductions around the school on walking school bus mornings. Officers also carried on a broad range of policy and environmental supports in their communities across the Moore and Montgomery County region. For example, a new county-wide pedestrian and bicyclist advocacy group, Make Moore Connections, formed in 2011. Pinehurst leaders also hope to create a bicycle master plan by 2013. “It’s a lot easier to bring people to the table when you have an existing track record,” said Woford.

Meanwhile, efforts to establish Pinehurst Walks! as a permanent initiative at the elementary school have succeeded. Pinehurst Elementary School’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA) formed a walking school bus subcommittee, led by two parent champions who had previously served as volunteers and wanted to program to continue. The initiative remains strong, with an estimated 100 students participating each week.

Pinehurst Elementary School’s initiative has been a model for changing the environment around the school, and for inspiring students to view active travel as a school norm. In addition to the ongoing walking school bus, many children now walk and bike to school several days a week, which was unheard of in the past. “Every time I see a child smiling on the playground or whiteboard, I feel a great deal of pride. It just warms my heart,” said Woford. Given that changes at Pinehurst Elementary have paled the way for change across the village, this bodes well for a healthier, more active Pinehurst.

The walkability audit to the Pinehurst Village Council, making the case for a path connecting the school to the library and village center. The planning and zoning board became a walking school bus volunteer, generating a stronger advocacy for safe connections to school. The police department, initially reluctant about the initiative for fear of potential vehicle–pedestrian accidents, became involved after they witnessed huge traffic reductions around the school on walking school bus mornings. Officers also carried on a broad range of policy and environmental supports in their communities across the Moore and Montgomery County region. For example, a new county-wide pedestrian and bicyclist advocacy group, Make Moore Connections, formed in 2011. Pinehurst leaders also hope to create a bicycle master plan by 2013. “It’s a lot easier to bring people to the table when you have an existing track record,” said Woford.

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**HIGHLY COMMUNITY: TOWN OF EDENTON**

A one-quarter mile paved walking track between the adjacent White Oak Elementary and D.F. Waker Elementary School was built to encourage walking at school in a rural area where larger distances and lack of sidewalks made walking to school unlikely. Leaders incorporated track use into the schools’ policies, modifying the student handbook to require 15 minutes of daily track use and providing time for walking during recess and an extended lunch period. A joint-agreement with Edenton’s recreation department also allowed students to use the track, which was located in an area with few other recreational resources. The track has served as a locale for active school and community events since its construction in 2008.

**HIGHLY COMMUNITY: ROWAN COUNTY (MILLBENDGE ELEMENTARY)**

Partners at Millbridge Elementary in the rural town of China Grove constructed the Discovery Garden in 2009. Collaborations among school administration, teachers and parents, as well as Rowan County’s health department and cooperative extension, resulted in four raised garden beds, an irrigation system, fruit trees and bushes, a compost bin and an outdoor learning center with food preparation equipment. The school adopted requirements to integrate tasting of garden produce into the curriculum and cafeteria, while a permanent board was established to sustain the garden.
Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure

Infrastructure that allows residents to reach destinations by foot, bicycle, wheelchair or other non-motorized means is an important part of a community’s capacity to support healthy, active lifestyles. Sidewalks, greenways, bicycle lanes and bicycle boulevards give people the ability to make active choices and can connect homes to schools and workplaces, and grocery stores. These projects are typically planned and prioritized years in advance, so having local policy documents such as pedestrian and bicycle plans to prioritize needs and secure resources, is essential to long-term success. The infrastructure-building process is a marathon, not a sprint.

The high cost of capital improvement projects often makes them challenging to pursue. While some physical improvements are economical – striping bicycle lanes, for example – investing in comprehensive facilities to make the streets accessible for all users can be expensive. Even with determined local partnerships, resources at the local, state and federal levels are inadequate to meet the need for improved infrastructure. Support from city and county officials, and collaboration with state agency officials, is important to help identify and access funding streams and address regulatory hurdles. Fit Community initiatives involving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure were often successful because they started as demonstration projects that leveraged funding from a wide range of sources, helped partnerships convene local stakeholders of the value and work the expanded into a broader vision.

Case Study: Town of Burnsville and Yancey County – Project PLAY and Getting on the Right Track

When a newly-revamped pedestrian planning committee convened in 2008 of a major state highway widening project soon to come through Burnsville and Yancey County in western North Carolina, the group saw potential to link the one-mile span between downtown Burnsville and Mountain Heritage High School. Initial inquiries were discouraging; the Department of Transportation’s DOT plans were already developed and could not be changed. Refocusing on other aspects of the town’s pedestrian plan, the committee secured federal stimulus funding to complete another high priority sidewalk connection on North Main Street between downtown and two community recreation venues. One of the highway projects hit a major delay; the partnership renewed its advocacy for inclusion of the one-mile pedestrian connection. This time, what was previously thought impossible happened. The DOT agreed to build a state-of-the-art, ten-foot-wide pedestrian path alongside the highway project that would bridge the two key destinations.

This win for active transportation infrastructure happened within a broader context of two distinct Fit Community grants received in 2007 and 2009. Both projects enhanced physical activity in the community while they addressed inadequate pedestrian safety between these venues and the nearby town center a goal which led to the formation of the aforementioned pedestrian planning group. In a second Fit Community-funded project, Yancey County Schools spearheaded efforts to revitalize and reconstruct the dilapidated athletic complex at Mountain High School and explore the development of a pedestrian connection from the school to downtown Burnsville. The pedestrian planning committee remained active and continued to push for pedestrian infrastructure projects. Thanks to these efforts, “There is a new focus on connectivity that wasn’t here before,” said Cathy Martin, grants director for Yancey County Schools. “The concept is tough in mountain towns, but sitting in meetings where people ask, ‘Why can’t we connect Mountain High School to East Yancey Middle?’ has been pretty amazing.”

Engaging the right partners in the pedestrian planning committee was critical. “Walking and other active transportation projects are not isolated to the work public health, planning, economic development and the school system. Regional partnerships like the DOT, Yancey County, and state and local governments come together and prioritize [the pedestrian path] and commit the local funds. They were supportive, which made DOT supportive.”

Community partners also worked together to ensure that programs and promotions complemented changes in the physical environment. “This Burnsville gym is a popular venue for active indoor programs, especially during winter months, and for people who have disabilities that make it difficult to exercise outside in Burnsville’s hilly terrain. The high school track is well utilized through school athletic and recreational programming. A joint-use agreement provides community access to the facility which is used for walking and running clubs and local events such as Sheriff’s Department Special Olympics. Project leaders have also noticed an increase in the number of people using sidewalks and recreational facilities outside of formal programs, thanks to growing awareness of these new opportunities for physical activity.

The momentum to create and connect more active community environments has increased since Fit Community funding ended. An economic development partnership directed grant funding to the expansion of downtown sidewalks. Partners across the area continue to focus on strategies to increase active transportation connections between key destinations, such as the county’s first comprehensive park complex that is underway after many years of discussion. Community partners converged around a collaborative site planning process that featured greenway connections from the future park to the high school, health department and medical clinic. Additionally a new partnership formed to expand a network of trails, starting with the high school campus and linking directly to the future pedestrian path.

Project leaders still marvel at the scope of the changes spurred by two modest Fit Community grants investments. “That $120,000 leveraged us over $1.3 million, and stakeholders included town and county officials as well as make a huge impact,” said Martin. “Like the work underway in Burnsville and Yancey County goes beyond pavement and facilities. With a commitment to cultivate both daily activity and capacity and energy to create a more active Yancey County. As a result, they have linked their shared vision to a better future and a healthier community, with connections that will last a lifetime.”

“Highlighted Community: City of Wilmington”

Wilmington built the Ann Street Bicycle Boulevard, a first in North Carolina. Infrastructure including flashing lights at intersections, signage, and painted road markings increase safety and give bicyclists priority along a 1.4-mile route on city streets. It connects to other bike paths and links residents to city parks, schools, and the farmers’ market. Community partners also installed two Fit-Stop stations to enable bike repairs along the route. The city assumed ongoing maintenance responsibilities for the boulevard and worked with a variety of partners to promote its use by local residents.

“Highlighted Community: City of Greensboro”

Fit Community funds supported the first segment of the Greensboro Greenway, a four-mile loop circling downtown and enhancing the urban landscape while providing additional opportunities for physical activity and active transportation. An additional connector segment also linked residents in the Warnerville neighborhood, a historically distressed area, to the main Greenway. The city installed 24-hour lighting to address public safety concerns and also established the first greenway public art project, an idea which emerged through engaging Warnerville residents in the process.

“Highlighted Community: Greensboro”

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Community Gardens

Community gardens can visibly demonstrate a local commitment to increase residents’ access to fresh fruits and vegetables. When situated in parks and at schools, community gardens have tremendous potential to build relationships and unite residents across diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods. Walks to support garden operations are critical, and help ensure that physical resources and human capital are available to promote their long-term sustainability.

People, especially children, are more likely to eat food that they have grown themselves. Healthier eating is not always a natural extension of gardening. Knowledge and skills are required to prepare healthy meals once produce is in hand. As the following community examples illustrate, Fit Community garden-based partnerships worked hard to increase community investment in growing and eating healthy food.

HIGHLITITED COMMUNITY: TOWN OF BLACK MOUNTAIN

Sharing the beauty of a local, healthy harvest has become a way of life in the western North Carolina town of Black Mountain, whose partnership expanded a successful community garden and launched two school gardens with Fit Community funds. Across the three sites, garden beds were expanded or added, edible landscaping planted, irrigation and composting systems installed, providing community-wide access to fresh produce and educational venues for students. A portable demonstration kitchen and a resource library at the community center provide additional support for gardening and healthy eating. Organizers donate much of the gardens’ produce to the Welcome Table, which serves weekly meals to community members in need, and the local backpack program, which provides weekend nourishment for children who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

Case Study: City of Lenoir – Unity Park Community Gardens

When two fires damaged and then destroyed the abandoned Singer Furniture Plant in 1997 and 1999, the vacant site left a scar on Lenoir’s landscape. Like many cities facing economic declines following industrial plants closures, the community also struggled to regain a sense of hope. But in 2010, the city’s leaders invested in a park, which mirrored the resilience and spirit of the community itself. The Unity Park Community Gardens initiative was conceived as a way to bring residents together to grow and share fresh produce, and build a local culture supportive of community gardening and healthy eating. The vision for the park included: 102 raised garden beds, an irrigation system, fruit orchard, garden tool shed, and composting systems installed, providing community-wide access to fresh produce and educational venues for students.

The seeds of the Unity Park Community Gardens initiative were planted earlier in 2008 when several local residents were passionate about gardening and food security issues. A number of small, faith-based garden projects were initiated. One such project, the Bear Street community garden, had such a positive community-building effect that local leaders took notice. Partners from Caldwell Memorial Hospital, Caldwell Farms®, the local cooperative extension, and the chamber of commerce all expressed interest in supporting the park with a grand opening in Spring 2011. The vision for the park was that it would provide a place for children to eat whatever they grow, said David Horn, business development vice president at Caldwell Memorial Hospital.

Enabling the community to eat healthier as a result of the Unity Park garden is a priority for the partnership, a charge that has been led by Caldwell Memorial Hospital and the local media. Two hospital employees who have become local celebrities through their public service television show, Two Men and a Stone, often refer to the garden in their cooking demonstrations, which feature the project’s signature heirloom tomatoes. Similarly the hospital’s three-year magazine provides residents with healthy recipe resources in print, while the local newspaper regularly features local and regional recipes with seasonal healthy ingredients.

Efforts to build a local movement that supports gardening and healthy eating in Lenoir are succeeding. People and groups continue to adopt beds at Unity Park, while work to fully complete the park’s transformation continues. More broadly partners notice increased dialogue about food sources and the importance of fresh produce in a healthy diet. They also see more individuals planting their own gardens and significant interest in growing food for their use and the community. As City Manager Lane Bailey commented, “People at [the Bear Street Garden] got to know neighbors they’d never talked to before. This unity garden will do it again, on a larger scale. This is a community-building effort that has become a community-wide participation.”

“I’m a part of a group of kids that will eat whatever they grow.”
Many adults spend the majority of their waking hours at work, making work sites an important setting for promoting health. Work site policies and environmental changes that support physical activity, healthy eating and tobacco-free lifestyles have great potential to shift employee norms and create an organizational culture that favors healthy choices. Benefits such as lower healthcare costs, reduced absenteeism, greater productivity and more job satisfaction often ensue, while the healthy habits employees adopt at work can also influence their families, friends and other community members.

Despite these benefits, employers often consider work-site wellness initiatives too time intensive and costly to implement or limit them to educational messages that may be too short-term. Fit Community grantees involved in work-site initiatives overcome such barriers by harnessing the power of community partnerships and introducing work-site stakeholders to strategies such as healthy cafeterias and vending policies, or connecting them to local resources such as parks, farmers’ markets and trails, generating sustainable changes to support work-site health in ways that often touch the entire community.

Work Sites

Michael Jackman.

1. “People are starting to see us as the go-to place [for work site wellness].”

Case Study: Mecklenburg County – Working Toward Wellness

When employers and employees contact Mecklenburg County’s Working Toward Wellness program to learn how to support a healthier workplace culture, they might be surprised by the range of possibilities that go beyond traditional promotion-based strategies. Available to businesses across the county the program coordinator provides on-site assessments, recommendations designed to help transform work sites into settings that make healthy choices the easiest choices, and follow-up support to assist employers in making changes.

Work sites in Mecklenburg County and beyond also have access to a public web site that features resources for policy changes, environmental supports, programs and promotions and strategies for forming wellness partnerships. “All the research on employee wellness advocate, Jean Duckwall, stated, “It was so nice to hear that other companies are hiring the same roadblocks and having the same issues, and reassuring me that it’s possible.” And a number of employers and wellness advocates, Jean Duckwall, stated, “It was so nice to hear that other companies are hiring the same roadblocks and having the same issues, and reassuring me that it’s possible.”

Since the program began with a Fit Community grant in 2006, more and more participating work sites have made changes to support physical activity and healthy eating during the work day. Policy changes include requiring healthy options to be available at meetings and in vending machines, prohibiting unhealthy food donations by employees and vendors, offering paid break time for physical activity and supporting walking routes and bike lanes. Mecklenburg County also implemented changes recommended on their site visit, and indicate that they are continuing to implement the changes recommended on their site visit.

The reach of Working Toward Wellness has been vast, with more than 75 work sites and more than 100,000 employees impacted by the recommendations and changes implemented between 2006 and 2012. Since the initiative began, its leaders have noticed an expanding interest in creating healthy work sites. “We are seeing a real shift toward understanding the benefits of health and wellness,” said Jackman. “People are starting to see us as the go-to place.”

Another important development is a quarterly networking breakfast, unveiled in 2010 when the Working Toward Wellness Coalition convened to inform employers of work-site wellness programs. “This was the first I’ve heard of a large group like ours convene employers in company wellness programs. “This was the first I’ve heard of a large group like ours convene employers in company wellness programs. It’s been our biggest homerun,” explained Jackman, because it helps employers go beyond a one-time effort to create a lasting culture of health and well-being.

The program coordinator provides on-site assessments, recommendations designed to help transform work sites into settings that make healthy choices the easiest choices, and follow-up support to assist employers in making changes. Work-site-focused component of Fit City, a county-wide initiative supporting citizens’ efforts to adopt healthier lifestyles through online resources, outreach and community events. As a crucial first step, a work site wellness coordinator position was created within a work site farmers’ market, market. Employees also benefit from an ongoing employee wellness program that provides incentives for making healthy choices.

The county’s support for Fit City Worksite Wellness amid a difficult economic climate is a testament to the program’s value and reflects an increasing priority on work site wellness at the local and federal levels. Following the end of Fit City funding in 2008, Mecklenburg County continued the program through a three-year Action Communities for Health, Innovation and Environmental Change (ACHIEVE) grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and subsequently integrated it into the health department as a permanent program in 2012. Under ACHIEVE, the program became Working Toward Wellness, and expanded on a new county component of local action teams specializing in work site wellness within their own organizations. The relationships and reputation for excellence formed early in the program helped attract new partners, allowing it to expand its influence in a paradigm-shifting way.

As the program coordinator, Julie Jackman, said, “It was so nice to hear that other companies are hiring the same roadblocks and having the same issues, and reassuring me that it’s possible.”

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Designation recipients demonstrated excellence in making physical activity, healthy eating and tobacco use prevention more accessible and attainable across community, school and work settings.

Designation Case Study: City of Mount Airy

When the city of Mount Airy created its first department of parks and recreation in 2005, leaders took a critical step toward investing in the health of the community: convening a diverse group of partners and applying for a Fit Community designation with the goal of receiving it in 2006 and 2008. In 2009, according to Parks and Recreation Director Catrina Alexander, the city received one of the first Nourishing North Carolina grants through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. "We have over 30 wineries in this area, and some of those probably tobacco farms at one time," said Alexander, noting that changing norms and residents' values have helped the community re-envision its potential. In so many ways, a healthy community agenda serves a broader economic development agenda in Mount Airy. Local leaders and partners comment that the Fit Community designation has bolstered grant funding and is part of their strategic plans to attract new business to the region and to build a strong local government commitment to continually improve health and quality of life for all residents. Alexander sums it up well, saying: "We want our asparagus and we want to eat it too." When the city of Mount Airy created its first department of parks and recreation in 2005, leaders took a critical step toward investing in the health of the community: convening a diverse group of partners and applying for a Fit Community designation with the goal of receiving it in 2006 and 2008. In 2009, according to Parks and Recreation Director Catrina Alexander, the city received one of the first Nourishing North Carolina grants through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. "We have over 30 wineries in this area, and some of those probably tobacco farms at one time," said Alexander, noting that changing norms and residents' values have helped the community re-envision its potential.

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Designation Case Study: Pitt County

The Alice F. Keene Park – and a diverse, dedicated community partnership that translated this vision to reality in 2008 – is just one of many reasons why Pitt County has been awarded three Fit Community designation awards since 2006. The centrally-located park offers residents of this rural county in eastern North Carolina a range of opportunities for physical activity, including athletic fields, a 1.2-mile paved walking trail, community garden and playground. Intentionally situated near other key destinations, the park further establishes the area as a hub of activity with the farmers’ market, two schools, senior center, access to greenways and park. In place for several years is a flood buy-out land, church properties and malls to create having worked with stakeholders in places such as schools, businesses and faith organizations. The county maximizes its accessibility of safe spaces for physical activity has long been so that’s the beauty. If it’s a part of the policy, it happens.”

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“Accessibility of safe spaces for physical activity has long been a priority in Pitt County’s goal that has buy-in and collaboration. Efforts to integrate health considerations into local policies also represent a gradual but important shift from an incentive program to encourage their own healthy eating habits. All schools, meanwhile, have implemented state nutrition standards, which has a positive impact on vending, afterschool programs, school events, school meals and a la carte options. Finally, the farmers’ market offers nutrition education, featuring weekly demonstrations to encourage fruit and vegetable consumption among patrons.

In addition to collaboration, leaders cite persistence and incremental change as keys to success. For example, informal encouragement led to an official healthy option policy for all food offered at county-sponsored activities. Since the policy’s passage, more healthy options continue to appear. “We start with small ‘have to’s’ and when we get used to that, we take another step,” said Jo Morgan, Pitt County’s health education director. Efforts to integrate health considerations into local policy decisions also represent a gradual but important shift that has paid dividends. Pitt County received a $1.6 million grant that helped them establish a new comprehensive plan integrating land use and health. Many successful local and state funded initiatives led to that new funding, including those through the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of NC Foundation, Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina, Pitt Community and others – all contributing to the county’s ability to leverage additional resources.

Fit Community Designation: Case Studies
Downtown Salisbury continues to serve as an incubator for new active living and healthy eating supporters, including a farmers’ market that was established in 2004. Since its inception, the market has expanded its hours of operation, accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and months of service, added a public transit stop and began accepting Electronic Benefits Transfer to serve lower-income populations.

Acclaimed as a vibrant, livable city, Salisbury’s downtown revitalization efforts have greatly enhanced its unique and pleasant pedestrian environments, and have served as a model for increasing healthy living opportunities across the entire community. Shops, restaurants, businesses and a thriving arts scene provide a regional draw and have led to an increasing number of residents to live in and around the city center.

“Several initiatives like health and wellness, parks and recreation and historic preservation all seem to collide in downtown,” commented Elaney Hasselmann, public information officer for the city of Salisbury. "The city’s comprehensive land use plan Vision 2020, together with its land development ordinance (LDO), has played an important role in shaping Salisbury’s urban landscape. Adopted in 2001, Vision 2020 was strategic in establishing policies to create active community environments at a time when the concept was still emerging, through priorities such as increased density, sidewalk and greenway connectivity, and access to park and recreation facilities within one-quarter mile of all residences. The LDO, adopted in 2008, subsequently translated the policy recommendations into specific land use regulations, ensuring that the city’s vision was carried and maintained to the source of future growth and development. Salisbury has long tied urban development to quality of life, demonstrated through its nationally-recognized historic preservation initiatives since the early 1970s.

The successes taking place in the local school system and in downtown Salisbury reflect a city-wide priority to incorporate health impacts into community development decisions. A prime example is the city’s partnership with the housing authority of Salisbury, which resulted in a Choice Neighborhoods planning grant award through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Funds support a two-year comprehensive planning process to redesign a distressed public housing community into a sustainable mixed-income neighborhood. The city wants to link residents of public housing and those of the surrounding neighborhood with essential services, including childcare and healthcare facilities, as well as providing access to recreational and career development programs. The city was well positioned to help coordinate such an initiative, due to a range of programs and initiatives that serve to improve quality of life across the most disadvantaged areas of the community.

Strong partnerships and visionary leaders underlie Salisbury’s successful integration of community development and health initiatives. Partnerships encompass a diverse range of advisory groups, boards and non-profit agencies, such as those representing education, recreation and historic preservation, downtown development, housing and community groups, boards and non-profit agencies, such as those representing education, recreation and historic preservation, downtown development, housing and community groups, boards and non-profit agencies to transform vacant lots into community gardens and neighborhood parks.

School officials have also emphasized the creation of healthy environments, including families across the region. The Rowan-Salisbury School System Child Nutrition Program upgraded its food preparation serving facilities to increase fresh fruits and vegetables, and now lists all area’s nutritional content. School leaders implemented a healthy eating curriculum, and made menu choices taste-tested and approved by students. Such changes in schools have spurred similar momentum among childcare centers. One such facility features healthy eating classes for parents and teachers, and an on-site garden. Future plans include a greenhouse and chicken coop to enhance children’s understanding of where their food comes from and to instill healthy habits.

The city-county partnerships with the health department and community groups will help maximize resources and create a shared sense of community. As Salisbury looks to the future, the city intends to remain innovative in prioritizing policies, environments and community supports that contribute residents’ health and quality of life.

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Comprehensive, multi-level interventions, such as those guided by the FP Community Action Model, are valuable for community efforts that address healthy eating and active living environments. However, such interventions can be challenging to implement. Lessons learned through the Fit Community project highlight a number of insights that community partnerships, funders and technical assistance providers can use in their work to support healthier communities.

Lesson: Nurture Authentic Collaborative Partnerships.

COMMUNITY

FP 22. Facilitate discussions between truly collaborative multidisciplinary partnerships versus “partnerships on paper.” The most effective partnerships minimized the art of connecting a wide variety of action-oriented partners that were willing to cross institutional and sometimes historical boundaries, in order to achieve a larger community-wide vision and catalyze sustainable change. They were able to overcome the tendency to work and think in institutional silos, where each partner’s own agency comes first. True collaborative partnerships provided a firm foundation for every successful outcome.

FP 23. Engage partnership leaders who are passionate about the work, personally and professionally. Leaders (i.e., project directors and coordinators) are essential in creating and maintaining momentum, and partners with personal commitment to the work often made a tremendous difference in a project’s success and ongoing impact within the community.

FP 24. Take time to cultivate collaborative relationships among new and existing organizations by strengthening interpersonal ties and engaging in proactive problem-solving. While collaborating across disciplines is an asset to making active living and healthy eating work, barriers often arise as coalition members determine how they will make decisions, share responsibilities and take action. Partnerships that were intentional about examining group communications and processes avoided some of the pitfalls associated with interpersonal and inter-organizational conflict. They will make decisions, share responsibilities and take action. Partnerships that were intentional about examining group communications and processes avoided some of

FP 25. Allocate additional funding to support partnership development activities, which can be tailored to meet their unique needs. Examples include hosting a workshop or training activity in a relevant conference setting, another community engaged in similar work or other activities envisioned by the community partnership.

FP 26. Structure a designation application in a way that encourages or requires collaboration within a multidisciplinary community partnership, rather than as a process that enables completion by a single organization or agency.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TA) PROVIDER

FP 27. Place coalitions where they are. By recognizing that community partnerships vary in the degree of technical assistance they desire or need, a skilled technical assistance provider can build mutual trust to provide collaborative and constructive support throughout the course of an initiative.

FP 28. Establish strong rapport and transparency early on and throughout an initiative in order to gain better insight into group dynamics and assist in partnership capacity assessments. As an objective third party, a technical assistance provider can provide feedback on partnerships’ strengths and gaps, suggest others who may need to be engaged, anticipate potential areas for conflict, offer timely and appropriate resources, and facilitate helpful coaching conversations.

FUNDER

FP 29. Reward communities that demonstrate evidence of true partnership. Meeting with funders before making funding decisions provided valuable insights about the nature of each partnership and helped answer key questions. Did key partners take the time to attend the meeting, or were a number of organizations absent without explanation? Did partners seem at ease in their interactions and able to collectively articulate a shared vision, or was the presentation scripted and the discussion led by one representative? Information gleaned from such meetings often provided critical insights that helped inform funding decisions.

FP 30. Provide flexibility for partnerships that must build their capacity to integrate community engagement into their work, versus those that are immediately ready to do so. Assessments should occur in the proposal design and selection process to help ensure prospective applicants align with the appropriate opportunity since it can be difficult for community partnerships with varying levels of experience and resources to achieve similar outcomes under the same set of expectations.

FP 31. Allow sufficient time to address community engagement. A shorter planning process in the beginning of a designation application and/or grant period can give project leaders the chance to work through trust-building activities that help build community ownership from the onset of an initiative.

FP 32. Design a designation application process to include the experiences and input of community members. Otherwise, the process may be driven in a top-down fashion by one or more agencies with the time and motivation to engage in the work, with little opportunity for residents to offer their perspectives.

TA PROVIDER

FP 33. Offer resources, coaching and referrals on effective community engagement strategies, as true community engagement can be complex and require time to build understanding among different stakeholders and partners.

Lessons Learned Guide

Lesson: Engage Community Members as Full Partners in the Work.

COMMUNITY

FP 34. Lead initiatives that are both top-down and bottom-up in nature. Support from elected officials and community agency leaders is often critical to secure resources and change policies, yet this should not overshadow direct community engagement and ownership in an initiative. The most successful and sustainable grant projects combined traditional and community-based leadership. As grantees and their initiatives achieved greater degrees of community ownership, they saw a groundswell of authentic advocacy and support for healthy community environments, as well as greater sustainability of the work.

FP 35. Meet coalitions where they are. By recognizing that community partnerships vary in the degree of technical assistance they desire or need, a skilled technical assistance provider can build mutual trust to provide collaborative and constructive support throughout the course of an initiative.

FP 36. Establish strong rapport and transparency early on and throughout an initiative in order to gain better insight into group dynamics and assist in partnership capacity assessments. As an objective third party, a technical assistance provider can provide feedback on partnerships’ strengths and gaps, suggest others who may need to be engaged, anticipate potential areas for conflict, offer timely and appropriate resources, and facilitate helpful coaching conversations.

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TA PROVIDER

FP 39. Offer resources, coaching and referrals on effective community engagement strategies, as true community engagement can be complex and require time to build understanding among different stakeholders and partners.

It was great to meet with [other grantees] in person and the ALBD team at the annual grantees meeting. Any little bits of education I soaked up.

– Julie Jackson, work site wellness program coordinator and project coordinator with Mecklenburg County’s Fit Community grant.
**COMMUNITY**

1. Work toward developing partnership capacity to achieve transformational and sustainable community change, realizing that seemingly small challenges may require significant barriers. For example, partnerships may inadvertently generate conflict by failing to establish consensus about roles, responsibilities, decision-making processes, resource sharing practices, or the influence of differing organizational cultures. Partnerships may include local health facilities or technical assistance providers to help explore and develop their capacity or can connect with other communities in similar contexts for mutual learning, both with positive results.

2. Keep an open mind to the potential benefits of working with a technical assistance provider, even though the experience may be new. For example, ongoing communications with an outside source who is invested in the initiative but independent from the funder yielded valuable insights in project implementation, through coaching and problem-solving discussions and connections with a broader learning network.

3. Unlike a designation application to generate a menu of options that engages partners in understanding the wide range of potential healthy eating and active living strategies their community could implement, especially if the community partnership is new to this work.

**FUNDER**

1. Recognize that communities have different levels of capacity and readiness to implement comprehensive healthy eating and active living programs. There are many pathways to success, necessary supports and expected outcomes, so initiatives should be structured with sufficient flexibility to accommodate communities across a range of capacity levels. Understand that capacity building takes time, and that the process may be especially lengthy for those communities at the lower end of the experience spectrum.

2. Support partnerships’ participation in ongoing capacity and learning development. Opportunities to connect with colleagues engaged in similar work and supervising similar challenges can inspire new and creative ideas, building a partnership’s potential for success. For example, learning and networking with an outside source who is involved in the initiative but independent from the funder yielded valuable insights in project implementation, through coaching and problem-solving discussions and connections with a broader learning network.

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**FINDER**

1. Schedule regular communications with grantee partners to discuss success, challenges, and lessons learned. Consistent contact allows technical assistance providers to build collaborative and open relationships, provide an informed yet objective perspective, and create an outlet for grantees to discuss both successes and challenges.

2. Build trust from day one. The application phase of an initiative is an ideal time to begin a technical assistance relationship, because applicants receive tailored feedback before submitting their proposals and understand that the TA provider not only would be there for ongoing support as they gain experience with concepts such as policy and environmental change, and avoid spending time developing an application that is unlikely to succeed.

3. Give tailored feedback to community partners in response to their designation applications. Capacity building can take place by simply hearing an outside source’s insights and engaging in a discussion about the strengths and opportunities for improvement revealed in the application. Partnerships can use this information to help prioritize their goals, shape advocacy and communication strategies, and seek future funding opportunities.

**COMMUNITY**

1. Create a targeted initiative that connects to a community-wide vision. Focusing on a specific geographic area or population can make initiatives more manageable and increase their likelihood of success. Success, in turn, helps rally people and resources around the initiative and the larger vision to which it connects, setting the stage for broader and longer-term progress.

2. Plan beyond the context of your community’s geographic and institutional space. For example, the Fit Community grant program is especially challenging for communities to create sustainable policies and environmental change within the context of a two-year, $60,000 grant project, though they were able to make significant progress toward this goal.

3. Bolster communities’ efforts to prioritize policy and environmental change work in a design application by emphasizing those criteria in applicant evaluations, and including a range of ideas that help communities identify their strengths and potential areas of improvement.

**FINDER**

1. Above all, focus time and funding to support comprehensive community change initiatives. Due to the complex, dynamic, and multidisciplinary nature of such work, it was often challenging for communities to create sustainable policy and environmental change within the context of a two-year, $60,000 grant project, though they were able to make significant progress toward this goal.

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3. Provide sufficient time and funding to support comprehensive community change initiatives. Due to the complex, dynamic, and multidisciplinary nature of such work, it was often challenging for communities to create sustainable policy and environmental change within the context of a two-year, $60,000 grant project, though they were able to make significant progress toward this goal.

**COMMUNITY**

1. Recognize that policy change is often the most difficult strategy to understand and implement, and provide early and ongoing support in this area. Give clear guidance regarding expectations at the outset of the grant period and in designation application and provide support that assists partnerships in translating policy work in ways that are relevant to community members and partners.

2. Encourage partnerships to consider a range of policy, including changes in institutional and organizational practices and guidelines, rather than focusing solely on laws or ordinances.

“*It was really helpful that someone could be there to be my sounding board and give advice. It was expertise you could count on.*”

— Amy Steele, executive director, Graham Children’s Health Services and project director with the Town of Burnsville’s Fit Community grant.
Lesson: Build Flexibility Into the Process.

**COMMUNITY**
- Expect to adapt to the inevitable changes that occur within a comprehensive community-based initiative. The evolving nature of the work and unpredictable factors such as politics, partnership dynamics and even the weather can generate unexpected opportunities and challenges, and partnerships must be ready to respond to changing realities within their communities. For example, turnaround in project staff as well as budget and work plan revisions sometimes led to fundamental changes in project scope. In these situations, the most successful initiatives relied on partnerships, collaboration, creative use of resources and transparent communication with the technical assistance provider and funder to navigate such changes.

**FUNDER**
- Plan for regular discussions and updates regarding grant progress. The dynamic nature of community change work makes it difficult for funders when a hardship is/unknown about project conditions and requires open to revisions in project leadership, budgets and scope.
- Reduce administrative barriers regarding approval and use of funds so communities can be nimble with grant dollars and adjust to changing conditions and emerging needs, as well as capitalize on unexpected opportunities that could add value to a project. Trust between funders and grantees increases with transparency regarding spending requirements and provides an alternative balance of budget oversight and flexibility.

Lesson: Consider Equity in the Effects of Any Initiative.

**COMMUNITY**
- Recognize the importance of place within communities. Health disparities are often influenced by where people live and work and therefore are extremely relevant for local partners who are working on healthy community initiatives. The evolving nature of the work and unpredictable factors such as politics, partnership dynamics and even the weather can generate unexpected opportunities and challenges, and partnerships must be ready to respond to changing realities within their communities. For example, turnaround in project staff as well as budget and work plan revisions sometimes led to fundamental changes in project scope. In these situations, the most successful initiatives relied on partnerships, collaboration, creative use of resources and transparent communication with the technical assistance provider and funder to navigate such changes.

**FUNDER**
- Award funding to communities across a range of capacity and resource levels by designing initiatives that provide distinct supports and expectations for each. Funders could incentivize disparities between communities when they overlook proposals from lower capacity partners or award funding to those who may not be ready for a grant initiative with the same features as higher-capacity partnerships. In this way, communities that lack the resources and experience at the beginning of an initiative can better understand the work and lay a foundation for ongoing progress and achievement.
- Ensure that a basic understanding of the structural and historical reasons for inequities is part of the technical assistance provider’s competencies. Have a cadre of other technical assistance providers available, and help partnerships identify local experts to provide strategic support to assist in building and sustaining community capacity to address the equity issues raised by their work.
- Prepare to go beyond the concepts of active living and healthy eating while serving communities.

**TA PROVIDER**
- Ensure supply of budget oversight and flexibility.

Lesson: Prioritize and Support Evaluation.

**COMMUNITY**
- Identify resources to support local evaluation. Seek involvement from partners with experience in evaluation, and collaborate with community members to ensure that evaluation serves the community. Evaluation should align with project goals and work towards less challenging, more realistic and achievable additional work that does not ultimately benefit the implementation and sustainability of the initiative.
- Measure community-level outcomes that address more than simply individual-level program impacts and number of participants. Determine the goal, then plan the evaluation and begin gathering information so it can be utilized strategically.
- Consider the value of qualitative evaluation tools, such as Photovoice and/or storytelling techniques that can capture community change from residents’ perspectives. Such strategies can offer participants control regarding the capture of an initiative, and can also facilitate meaningful community engagement.
- Reference a completed designation application, or portions of it, as an evaluation tool to help prioritize future opportunities and/or gaps to be addressed.

**FUNDER**
- Engage in evaluation of an overall initiative by developing and investing in a clear evaluation plan before implementing begins, and working with an outside evaluator to ensure validity. A comprehensive, credible evaluation can help make the case for continued funding of active living and healthy eating work. It can also offer important lessons and evidence to guide future initiatives.
- Adequately fund local evaluations which allow communities to share the impact of their work with key stakeholders (designation makers and constituents) and builds support for continued collaboration over time. This can be done by assuring communities in identifying resources and capacities for evaluation and by providing additional funding.
- Provide evaluation tools and resources that are tailored to communities’ needs, and offer feedback on the evaluation tools that partnerships design.

**TA PROVIDER**
- Assist in analyzing, summarizing and using evaluation outcomes in meaningful ways, and with different audiences, to support sustainability.
- Steer communities toward evaluation strategies that offer the greatest impact for building a base of local support—those that frame the community’s work in terms that address key designation makers’ and constituents’ critical concerns.

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“‘We work together for the greater good, without competition for getting credit. That has been strengthened by the success of this project and how the community views it with pride.”

—David Horne, business development vice president, Caldwell Memorial Hospital and partner with the City of Lenoir’s Fit Community grant.
Fit Community Partnership

HCWTF: The North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund was created from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement as an investment in initiatives benefiting the health of North Carolinians. From 2001 to 2011, HCWTF invested over $125 million in tobacco prevention and cessation and $19 million in obesity prevention. Through its leadership, HCWTF contributed to a major shift in statewide policies to prevent tobacco use, achieved all-time lows in teen smoking rates, and addressed the growing obesity epidemic with supports for policy and environmental change.

ALBD: Active Living By Design was launched in 2002 as a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and is part of the North Carolina Institute for Public Health at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, NC. ALBD currently serves as the national program office for RWJF’s Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities initiative, and was chosen to partner on the Fit Community initiative because of its nationwide success in supporting community-led initiatives to increase active living and healthy eating. More information is available at www.activelivingbydesign.org and www.healthykidshealthycommunities.org.

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BCBSNC: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina

BCBSNC partnered with HWTF for two years on the Fit Community Partnership initiative and other preventive health initiatives. BCBSNC is a national leader in obesity prevention and is committed to making North Carolina healthier. More information is available at www.activelivingbydesign.org. Visit www.activelivingbydesign.org/fit_community_resources for a list of resources discussed throughout this document.

HCWTF: See above.

NC DPH: The North Carolina Division of Public Health works to promote and contribute to the highest possible level of health for the people of North Carolina. Within DPH, the Chronic Disease and Injury Section’s Physical Activity and Nutrition Branch has funded a variety of community-based initiatives that focus on creating healthier community environments. DPH funded Fit Community in its first year. More information is available at www.publichealth.nc.gov and www.nchcrh@health.nc.gov.

Resources discussed throughout this document are available for download at www.activelivingbydesign.org/fit_community_resources.

HECKLENBURG COUNTY: Heckleburg County Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities: Preventing Childhood Obesity and Tobacco Prevention/Quitline Program.

PITT COUNTY: Pitt County Healthy Kids Healthy Communities: Tobacco Prevention.

TOWN OF FAIDON: Town of Faison Healthy Communities: Tobacco Prevention.


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