

Capturing Community Change

Active Living by Design's

Progress Reporting System

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Abstract: The Active Living by Design (ALbD) National Program Office (NPO) developed an evaluation system to track progress of 25 community partnerships, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). Between June 2004 and October 2008, partnerships documented their actions and accomplishments through ALbD's online Progress Reporting System (PRS) database. All entries were verified and analyzed by the NPO. Results from the PRS suggest that the ALbD partnerships were successful fundraisers, leveraging \$256 million from grants, policy decisions, in-kind and direct sources. The partnerships also documented newspaper coverage, TV, and radio air time and they developed physical activity programs such as exercise clubs and "walking school buses." Partnerships were adept at influencing decision makers to create or rewrite policies and improve built environments. Selected policy examples included, but were not limited to, approvals for capital improvements, street design standards, and development ordinances. Partnerships also contributed to the completion and approval of influential planning products, such as comprehensive land use, neighborhood, and roadway corridor plans. The most common built-environment changes were street improvements for safer pedestrian and bicycle travel, including new crosswalks, bicycle facilities, and sidewalks. The ALbD community partnerships' accomplishments and challenges contribute to knowledge and best practices in the active living field. Five years after their grant began, RWJF's initial investment showed substantial and measurable results.

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Introduction

In November 2003, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) awarded grants to 25 communities across the U.S. as part of the Active Living by Design (ALbD) national program (www.activelivingbydesign.org). Funded communities' project areas were municipalities, counties, and regions. With 5 years of funding at a maximum of \$200,000 per community, approximately \$40,000 per year, these grantees intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines through innovative approaches to affect community design, public policies, and communication strategies.¹

The ALbD Community Action Model provided five strategies to influence community change (5Ps): preparation, promotions, programs, policies, and physical projects.² The 5Ps represent an integrated, comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through cross-

sector, multidisciplinary partnerships working across many settings and populations. In consultation with the NPO, each ALbD partnership developed its own intervention approach using the 5P framework with an emphasis on policy and environmental strategies. Best practices from many of these communities have been reported in a previous supplement.³

The RWJF and the ALbD National Program Office (NPO) recognized the importance of evaluating the 5-year grant program. Community partnerships that prioritize evaluation have the potential for greater effectiveness and sustainability.⁴ In addition, it is critical that health promotion partnerships measure their impact on policies and systems.⁵

In their role of providing technical support for grantees and as liaison to RWJF, the NPO aimed to develop a feasible approach for documenting and describing results from individual partnerships and the ALbD national program as a whole. Technical assistance delivered to partnerships included regular coaching calls, annual site visits, meetings, and other exchanges on topics such as coalition building, message development, assessment, media, and policy advocacy. The purpose of the internal evaluation system was threefold: to enable funded partnerships to track

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and display their own actions and results; to aid the NPO in delivering technical assistance; and to increase the NPO's and RWJF's understanding of the types of community changes that are possible from a grant program of its size and scale.

The purpose of this article is to describe the documentation system and report results of the evaluation conducted by the NPO of the funded ALbD communities. Specifically, to what degree did ALbD grantees achieve results across the 5P strategies? The results presented below are “intermediate” community outcomes rather than physical activity behavior changes. The information was collected, tracked, and summarized using a web-based system developed by the NPO to document the progress made by the funded community partnerships during the grant program.

The NPO's evaluation sought to understand and quantify the degree to which community partnerships achieved the following results, consistent with ALbD's 5P model, with the ultimate aim of increasing physical activity:

- secured additional funding (preparation);
- earned media coverage (promotions);
- contributed to new or expanded programs (programs);
- contributed to new or rewritten policies and planning products (policies);
- contributed to improved built environments (physical projects).

In addition to the NPO's internal evaluation of the ALbD partnerships, RWJF supported a complementary cross-site evaluation administered by an external evaluation firm. The cross-site evaluation is described in detail⁶ in this supplement to the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine (AJPM)*.

Progress Reporting System

Active Living by Design monitored progress of the 5-year grant program through a web-based “diary” documentation system called the Progress Reporting System (PRS). The NPO created the PRS to document community partnerships' activities and accomplishments but not the impact on individual behavior change. The PRS was password-protected and allowed grantees to generate their own personalized summary tables/charts; it also enabled ALbD staff to follow the progress of individual community partnerships and compile data across the portfolio of initiatives. The NPO developed a manual for PRS users and conducted trainings beginning in 2004.

Typically, grant-supported project directors and coordinators completed most entries, but in some cases other

partners were active contributors; they entered ALbD-related activities and accomplishments into the PRS as often as desired, but at least quarterly. PRS users entered data from June 2004 (retroactively to the grant start date in November 2003) until October 2008. NPO project officers approved all entries after checking each for completeness; periodic and summative data reports were prepared by NPO staff and shared with RWJF and the ALbD partnerships. Project officers also provided routine reliability checks of all PRS entries and coached local project staff for consistency and completeness.

The NPO designed the PRS to reflect the ALbD Community Action Model's 5P strategies, which each community partnership was expected to implement. Figure 1 graphically depicts the coding framework of the PRS. The PRS Model represents ALbD partnerships' actions and their resulting community changes. The model also indicates that new resources, policy changes, and physical projects are necessary precursors for sustainable systems in communities that can support active living in the long term. Examples of these are local transportation and school systems.

Partnerships documented actions and results when they occurred, which made the PRS a “real-time” evaluation tool. The PRS concept is based partially on an evaluation approach developed by Fawcett et al. for the CDC and later adapted by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services as the “Progress Check” system for local health departments.^{7,8} On entering actions and results, partnerships coded each entry according to the “PRS Logic Model” (Figure 1). For example, “preparation action” represented efforts to lay the groundwork for the intervention, and included “assessment actions” (e.g., surveys); resource requests (e.g., grant proposals); and “resources generated” (e.g., grant awards). Assessment actions are described in detail⁹ in this *AJPM* supplement.

“Promotion actions” (e.g., press releases) were efforts to increase awareness of existing opportunities for physical activity, publicize the benefits of physical activity, or highlight the importance of policy and environmental supports for physical activity. Promotion actions often resulted in “media coverage” (e.g., newspaper articles); PRS users were asked to indicate the number of “media hits” for each entry coded as media coverage. Attempts to increase active living programming were coded as “program actions”; the eventual creation and expansion of programs were coded as “program changes” (e.g., new Walking School Bus programs).

“Policy actions” were attempts to advocate to decision makers, which often led to “policy changes” (e.g., new ordinances) or in some cases resulted in “community planning products” (e.g., pedestrian master plans).

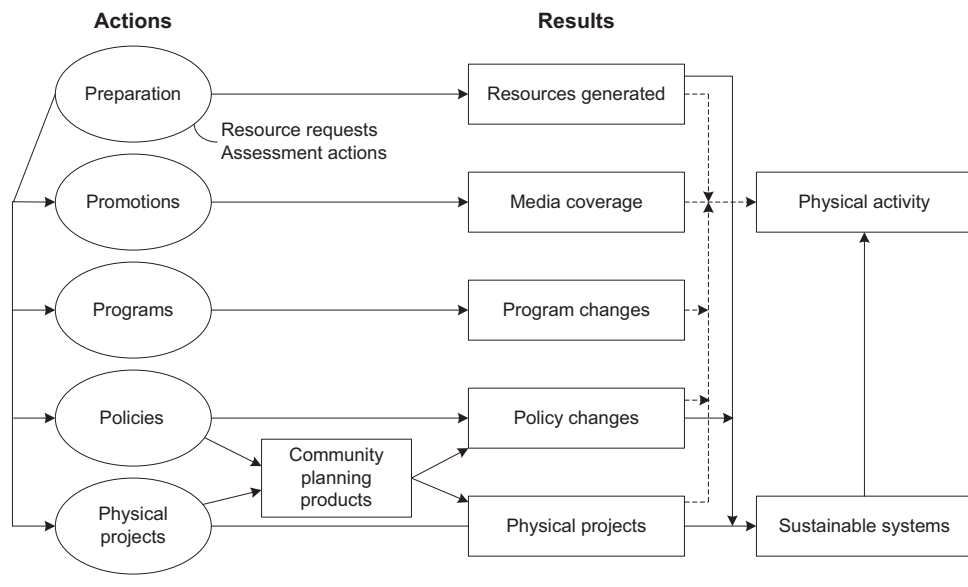


Figure 1. Progress Reporting System model

Finally, direct attempts to enhance the built environment to support physical activity were called “physical project actions” and, when successful, eventually led to “physical projects” (e.g., new trails). Additional examples are provided in the following section.

Reliability estimates of the PRS event-coding process were not assessed or quantified systematically. However, after each entry was coded initially by local grantees, NPO project officers verified the assignment of event codes. An NPO evaluation coordinator subsequently checked and corrected event codes to ensure consistency across all project officers and community partnerships. Project officers often discussed actions and results with local grant staff but did not independently verify accomplishments or the role of the partnerships in community changes.

Although the PRS was designed to capture both actions and results of partnerships, this paper only quantifies and reports results from their 5 years of funding, from November 1, 2003, to October 31, 2008. The following section summarizes the resources generated, media coverage, program changes, policy changes, community planning products, and physical projects. This paper reflects data from the final summative report submitted to RWJF from the ALbD NPO in September 2009. The summative report and a companion appendix included a complete listing of accomplishments (results) of the 25 ALbD partnerships.¹⁰

Resources Generated

The funded partnerships generated a variety of new resources for active living, including in-kind contributions, direct contributions, grant awards, and policy proj-

ect dollars. All 25 partnerships leveraged outside support during the 5-year grant period, totaling 437 reported resources generated. Local ALbD staff and partners reported playing a lead, contributing, or having an indirect role in securing a total of \$256 million for active living programs, promotions, and environmental supports (Table 1). The median amount across all types was \$10,000 per resource generated, including grants, donations, and policy-driven funding. Median amounts are provided in this paper instead of averages due to a limited number of very large contributions, which would otherwise skew the results.

provided in this paper instead of averages due to a limited number of very large contributions, which would otherwise skew the results.

In-kind contributions included project supports by partner organizations and individuals in the form of office space, staff time, pro bono services, materials, advertisement space, or other contributions that complemented ALbD grant funds. In-kind contributions totaled \$429,546 during the grant period, with a median in-kind amount of \$2400 per in-kind contribution. Grant awards were the most commonly reported type of resource generated and were documented by all 25 partnerships. Grant funders included governments, foundations, and private businesses operating at national, state, and local levels. Examples ranged from a \$500 Youth Conservation Corps grant for materials to a \$25 million U.S. Department of Transportation grant for nonmotorized transportation. Grant awards totaled \$64,119,944 during the ALbD project, with a median amount of \$17,500 per grant.

Direct contributions were financial commitments to partnerships or for active living supports within the

Table 1. Resources generated by type, Active Living by Design, November 2003–October 2008

Resource type	Number	Dollar amount	%
Policy project dollars	38	159,768,111	63
Grant awards	222	64,119,944	25
Direct contributions	97	31,971,001	13
In-kind	80	429,546	<1
Total	437	256,288,602	100

Table 2. Resources generated by year, Active Living by Design, November 2003–October 2008

Year	Number	Dollar amount	%
1	57	3,324,225	1
2	115	112,352,901	44
3	81	12,790,958	5
4	100	13,549,936	5
5	84	114,270,582	45
Total	437	256,288,602	100

ALbD project areas. Direct contributions included matching funds for related grants, organizational commitments to fund physical activity programming, and capital investments to improve physical infrastructure, such as parks, greenways, or sidewalks. Direct contributions totaled \$31,971,001 during the grant period, with a median amount of \$5000 per contribution.

Policy project dollars were resources resulting from specific council votes or decisions by political boards with funding authority. These are distinguished from direct contributions in that elected or other official bodies must approve of the funding to be counted as policy project dollars; direct voter approvals in referenda, ballots, or bond initiatives also were considered policy project dollars. The relationship between policy change and newly leveraged funding is also detailed in a companion paper¹¹ in this *AJPM* supplement. Policy project dollars totaled \$159,768,111 during the grant period, with a median amount of \$200,000 per funding-related policy change.

Policy project dollars had the greatest proportion of overall dollar amounts and included the largest single contributions (e.g., \$93 million resulting from one council vote that authorized development fees for sidewalk improvements, transit-oriented developments, and bicycle lanes).

Partnerships generated the fewest resources during Year 1, as they were establishing their presence locally. In terms of overall dollars leveraged, partnerships clearly had the greatest success leveraging funds during Years 2 and 5 (\$112 million and \$114 million, respectively); the number of resources generated at events was also highest in Year 2.

It is likely that Year 2 was the most successful year because many partnerships were very active submitting grants and making connections with new funders in Year 1. The Year 5 total was so large primarily because of a single policy decision resulting in \$93 million. Table 2 depicts the annual leveraging of resources throughout the grant period.

Media Coverage

Partnerships tracked results of their promotion actions as media coverage and media hits. News articles, stories, and other features were documented in the PRS if they mentioned the partnership directly, originated from the partnership, or otherwise addressed active living issues that were aligned closely with the partnerships' goals. The PRS tracked a range of media types, including billboard advertising, websites, newsletters, and flyers. However, media coverage highlights in this article are limited to mass media, such as newspaper, TV, and radio.

For every occurrence of print coverage or air time, partnerships reported one "media hit" to estimate the quantity of these over time. There were 2656 documented media hits during the grant period, with newspaper coverage being the most commonly reported (Table 3). Radio media hits were relatively high because announcements or stories were often aired repeatedly throughout the day and/or during a period of weeks. Substantial mass media coverage was documented early in the grant period, sustained throughout the initiative, and declined in Year 5.

Program Changes

Program changes were defined as organized, scheduled opportunities to engage in physical activity, which were either new or expansions of existing programs. These opportunities may have involved individuals directly in physical activity, such as walking clubs, or indirectly supported active living behaviors, such as bicycle repair/education programs. Programs were distinguished from policy and physical project efforts in that they focused directly on physical activity behavior change among individuals and groups. Partnerships reported 115 new or expanded programs to which they contributed directly or implemented themselves (Table 4).

The most common types of programs that partnerships helped influence, or implement directly, were physical activity opportunities in the community setting. Not surprisingly, youth-serving program changes typically centered around schools (e.g., "walking school buses" and afterschool programs focusing on children's fitness). Sev-

Table 3. Media hits by type, Active Living by Design, November 2003–October 2008

Resource type	Number	%
Radio	1352	51
Newspaper	891	33
TV	413	16
Total	2656	100

Table 4. Program changes by type, Active Living by Design, November 2003–October 2008

Program type	%	Number	Description
Community	27	31	Community programs supporting physical activity (e.g., walking or biking clubs, pedometer programs)
Safe routes to school	21	24	Safe Routes to School (e.g., Walk-to-School, Walking School Bus, traffic enforcement, safety education)
Employer	17	19	Employer program to engage employees in physical activity (e.g., walking club, fitness classes)
Before/after school	12	14	Before-school and afterschool physical activity programs (e.g., school-based, YMCA, YWCA)
Pedestrian/bike safety education	11	13	Bicycle and/or pedestrian safety training for youth or adults
Active transportation	5	6	Program to encourage use of alternative transportation other than to/from school (e.g., walk to shop, bike to work)
Other	4	5	Other program change to promote physical activity
In-school	3	3	School-based physical activity curriculum, other than standard physical education class
Total		115	

YMCA, Young Men's Christian Association; YWCA, Young Women's Christian Association

eral new programs for youth were based in community organizations, as were bicycle repair/education programs and multigenerational fitness programs. Other programs focused solely on adults or older adults, and several partnerships successfully created new physical activity opportunities within worksites. These new programs were created using the ALbD grant, funding from partners, or through other grant opportunities.

Although organized physical activity opportunities were often a high priority for residents, these programs generally required substantial staff time to develop, coordinate, and maintain. New programs often threatened to exhaust resources and took attention away from more-sustainable policy and physical projects. For this reason, partnerships were encouraged to look for outside funding to maintain and institutionalize pilot programs over time. Public health lead agencies typically were experienced with physical activity programming; however, in some cases this “comfort zone” hampered more integrated and comprehensive initiatives. Conversely, nontraditional lead agencies and partners, such as planning and design agencies, often struggled with their capacity to implement successful programs. Program changes were most commonly reported during Years 2 through 4 when partnerships were most active creating these supports for physical activity.

Policy Changes

Partnerships documented new and modified policies across a variety of settings. Policy changes occurred as a result of votes of elected bodies, decisions from department heads within government departments, or within organizations such as worksites. Policies were defined as

new or modified ordinances, codes, guidelines, and procedures believed to directly encourage physical activity or positively influence the built environment. In 115 instances, partnerships successfully led or contributed to advocacy efforts for improved policies to support physical activity or activity-friendly environments (Table 5).

Partnerships documented a substantial number of large and small policy changes in a relatively short time period. The most common policy changes were municipal and county ordinances, rules, or guidelines to promote pedestrian or bicycle movement, such as street design guidelines, zoning ordinances, and specifications for commercial and residential development. Decisions by elected boards to approve funding for pedestrian and bicycle facilities and safety improvements were the second most common type of policy change.

Partnerships' advocacy and persistence also persuaded elected officials and other decision makers to invest in capital projects. In addition, several communities created active living–related advisory boards to guide elected officials toward future policy priorities and public investments. Other changes included physical activity guidelines in schools and afterschool programs, new staff positions, policies related to school-site selection, and traffic-calming guidelines. Policy changes were reported during each year, with the most occurring in Year 2 ($n=49$, or 43% changes during the 5-year period).

Community Planning Products

A number of partnerships coordinated and contributed to public planning processes, with important results, which were coded as community planning products.

Table 5. Policy changes by type, Active Living by Design, November 2003–October 2008

Policy type	%	Number	Examples
Local ordinance/policy	24	28	Municipal or county ordinance, policy or guidelines to promote pedestrian/bike movement (e.g., roadway design guidelines)
Other	22	25	Other policy, practice, or public incentive to promote activity
Funding for pedestrian/bike	21	24	Funding for pedestrian/bike enhancements (e.g., municipal, state, federal enhancement funds, local bond measures)
Local board	8	9	Creation of official municipal or county board or committee to advise policymakers on active living issues
Approval of capital project	8	9	Capital improvement project approval by elected or other officials
Traffic-calming	5	6	Traffic-calming policy (e.g., design guidelines to slow neighborhood traffic, reduce speed limits)
Physical activity in schools	3	4	Policies requiring physical activity in schools and afterschool programs guidelines for preschools, physical education, afterschool care
School site selection	3	4	School-site selection, design, and construction standards (e.g., require less acreage, maintenance and rehabilitation, limit vehicular access)
New staff	3	3	Funding for new staff position related to active living (e.g., parks staff, certified physical education teachers)
Local budget line item	3	3	Newly dedicated budget item for pedestrian/bike facilities
Total		115	

Community planning products were master plans, studies, and reports approved by elected bodies and advisory groups, which resulted from intensive planning efforts. These documents themselves did not represent actual policy or environmental changes, but they were seen as important milestones for community change. The partnerships' work led to the creation or improvement of 45 community planning products (Table 6).

The most common community planning products were updated comprehensive plans and neighborhood plans (e.g., incorporating pedestrian or bicycle provisions). Partnerships also documented new trail master plans and special studies that focused on infrastructure design, engineering, and/or feasibility; "stand alone" pe-

destrian plans and one bicycle plan also were reported. Community planning products remained relatively stable across the 5-year grant period.

Physical Projects

A range of physical projects were documented as a result of partnership efforts to create or modify built environments for active living. Like policy changes, physical projects occurred in various settings: at workplaces, near schools, and in public spaces such as parks, streets, downtowns, and neighborhoods. In 188 instances, partnerships documented physical changes and improved activity-friendly environments (Table 7).

Table 6. Community planning products by type, Active Living by Design, November 2003–October 2008

Type	%	Number	Examples
Comprehensive plan	29	13	Land use, greenway, transportation master plan
Neighborhood plan	24	11	Small area plan incorporating pedestrian, bicycle, and/or transit provisions
Other	18	8	Bicycle master plan, corridor plan
Trails plan	9	4	Trail/greenway master plan
Design study	6	3	Design plan, engineering study
Pedestrian plan	7	3	Sidewalk, pathway, or pedestrian master plan identifying gaps in service and recommendations
Feasibility study	7	3	Assessment to determine practicability of a project
Total		45	

Table 7. Physical projects by type, Active Living by Design, November 2003–October 2008

Project type	%	Number	Examples
Pedestrian safety	21	40	Pedestrian signal, crosswalk
Bicycle facility	14	27	Bike lane, wide shoulder, outside lane, bike rack, bike locker, bike rack
Trail	13	25	Greenway/trail construction, maintenance, improvement, paving, “Rails to Trails”
Sidewalk	13	25	Sidewalk maintenance, improvement, expansion
Other	12	22	Public art, farmers market, transit shelter, swimming pool, employer walking track
Signage	7	13	Signage promoting facility for users (e.g., trail markings, point-of-decision prompts, mile markers)
Community garden	5	9	Publicly accessible garden space
Park	5	9	Park facility maintenance, improvement, expansion
New development	4	8	Commercial, residential, or mixed-use subdivision with pedestrian/bike-friendly design elements
Playground	3	5	Playground facility or equipment maintenance, improvement, expansion
Traffic-calming	3	5	Speed bump/table, crossing island, on-street parking
Total		188	

The most common physical projects included pedestrian and bicycle facilities, such as crossings, signals, striped bike lanes, bike racks, new/improved sidewalks, signage, and traffic-calming. Several partnerships also reported improvements to other public spaces, such as new trails, swimming pools, parks, community gardens, and playgrounds. Some partnerships documented physical changes within organizations, including new physical education equipment in schools, and improvements within a workplace. Partnerships also contributed to a small number of very large physical projects, including new walkable subdivisions.

Even though a considerable lag time should be expected for built-environment changes to be realized, several ALbD-funded communities contributed to physical infrastructure changes as early as Year 1. Physical projects were reported in all 5 years. Year 2 appeared to be the most successful year for physical project changes.

It is apparent from the PRS that, as a whole, the ALbD grantees were most successful in Year 2. It is possible that many partnerships had moved past some of the growing pains and planning of their initial year, yet still capitalized on the novelty of their active living initiatives in Year 2. Many partnerships experienced substantial turnover of partners and local staff during Years 3 through 5, which may have limited their effectiveness relative to Year 2. However, cumulative results of the ALbD partnerships represent steady progress by the 25 ALbD partnerships in creating new programs, policy changes, community planning products, and physical projects (Figure 2).

Discussion

The PRS proved to be a useful tool for documenting the variety of community changes that emerged from the ALbD grant program. In addition to its role in counting the results, the system collected qualitative vignettes, which contributed to an exchange of success stories and peer learning. The system enabled the NPO to provide detailed reports to RWJF regarding other resources leveraged and other community changes related to active living. The PRS also facilitated sharing of program updates from grantees to the ALbD NPO. Project officers were better informed for monthly technical assistance calls, site visits, learning teleconferences, and annual meetings. Likewise, some partnerships used the system as their own tracking mechanism for reporting back to their organizations, partners, funders, and other stakeholders.

Limitations

Although the PRS allowed the NPO to collect information on the partnerships' activities and accomplishments, the system was not without limitations. Because the PRS operated like a diary, the information collected depended on the diligence, accuracy, and objectivity of local staff and partners. Users of the system provided succinct yet descriptive summaries of actual events in their community, yet partnerships' diligence in reporting varied. For some, making PRS entries was challenging, given the time burden of project implementation and other professional commitments. The number of

potential PRS entries not made into the system is unknown.

The quantitative function of the PRS primarily was limited to counting results: new resources, media hits, programs, policies, and physical projects. Although it was feasible to categorize and tally results that are common to all partnerships, this approach simplified complex community changes. The PRS system could not rate each policy change for its potential impact on community form and ultimately the population. For example, when tallied in summary tables and graphs, a single small-employer flex-time policy had the same value as a new citywide complete streets ordinance. In addition, the PRS system did not measure easily the degree to which promotions, programs, policies, and physical projects were integrated and complemented each other.

Progress Reporting System users did their best to indicate the partnership’s role for each result. In many cases, attributing change to the partnership’s involvement was obvious, for example, when partners submitted a successful proposal for grant funding that directly grew out of their previous ALbD activities. But other instances were not as clear. Policy and built-environment changes typically involve complex processes of advocacy, policy development, government bureaucracy, and decision making within political environments.

In some cases, ALbD grantees found it difficult to gauge the precise influence of the partnership or its individual partners in passing a new ordinance. For example, a pedestrian advocacy organization may have had an impact on a budget decision to fund sidewalks without the ALbD grant. In other instances, an elected official was a clearly motivated champion for active living policies and attribution to the ALbD partnership was unclear. To minimize its burden on PRS users, the system was not designed to document population impacts of promotions, programs, policies, and physical projects attributed to the ALbD grant. Future evaluation efforts should consider simple methods for collecting such information.

Conclusion

During a 5-year period, ALbD partnerships had noteworthy accomplishments, particularly given the relatively modest funding awarded for their initiatives by RWJF. The Foundation’s \$15.5 million investment helped leverage a total of \$256 million for active living improvements. Because each grant averaged only \$40,000 annually, funding even one full-time coordi-

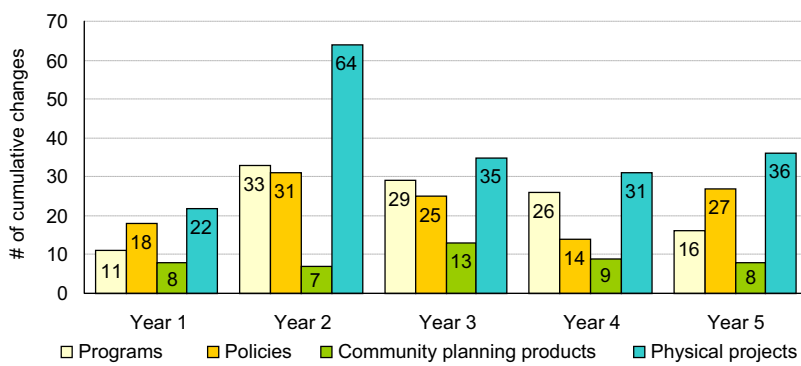


Figure 2. Number of changes (results) for Active Living by Design from November 2003 to October 2008, by year

nator position for 5 years presented a challenge for some. Yet ALbD partnerships leveraged RWJF’s investment many times over, bringing new initiatives and infrastructure improvements to the funded communities.

Collaborative action, through the community partnership model, was a central component of these 25 successful local active living movements. The collaborative ALbD approach enabled the lead agencies to extend their influence in changing policy and creating improvements in the built environment and document their successes using the PRS. The partnerships’ early success in attracting new funding, policies, and capital commitments for active living—and their positioning as community-change agents—helped many partnerships institutionalize their active living initiatives through their existing partners and other organizations.

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