

# Creating a Movement for Active Living via a Media Campaign

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**Background:** Activate Omaha (AO), a community-wide health initiative, was awarded a grant by Active Living by Design in 2003.

**Purpose:** To establish credibility of the partners in AO and increase awareness of active living in the community by emphasizing promotions (branding, logo recognition).

**Methods:** Media, including billboards, TV and radio ads, high-profile spokespersons, grassroots efforts, and worksite “toolkits” featuring tips and creative messaging on physical activity were combined to incentivize people to be physically active. Campaign surveys were conducted by the Market Survey Research Group each year from 2005 to 2008.

**Results:** Survey data based on the first campaign indicated that 86% of Omahans wanted to be part of an active community and to be active with younger generations. The second campaign focused on getting families physically active together, and this survey data showed that citizens wanted to be a part of an active community. A third campaign added practical examples of citizens being active within the community and efforts expanded to worksites with consistent messaging for employees. The final survey indicated that 78% of respondents found Omaha to be an active community compared to 63% who had that response 3 years earlier.

**Conclusions:** Activate Omaha was successful in gaining credibility and leveraging additional funding to implement complementary programming and physical projects, and as a result, changing community perceptions and influencing policy decisions.

(Am J Prev Med 2012;43(5S4):S390–S391) © 2012 American Journal of Preventive Medicine

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## Introduction

Activate Omaha (AO), a community-wide health initiative since 2003, aimed to be a national model for increasing physical activity levels. In Omaha NE, only 20% of adults meet leisure-time physical activity recommendations, and 26% get no leisure-time physical activity.<sup>1</sup> As a result, 60% of Omaha adults are overweight/obese.<sup>2</sup>

Social marketing represents an effective means to increase physical activity. AO launched a 3-year media campaign to raise awareness of the importance of active lifestyles and encourage physical activity. In each of the 3 years, the campaign was assessed to obtain (1) opinions about physical activity and Omaha as a place to lead active

lifestyles; (2) perceived opportunities and plans to be more active; and (3) awareness of the campaign.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this paper was to describe the development of a media campaign and provide others with effective marketing strategies to improve physical activity in their communities.

## Methods

Activate Omaha’s three campaigns were launched annually with an assessment at the end of each campaign (2005–2008). Market Survey Research Group conducted baseline (2005) and postcampaign (2005, 2006, 2008) assessment using random-digit-dial telephone surveys. The first media campaign, *It’s Time to Get Moving*, was launched in 2005. The baseline and postcampaign assessment of perceptions and awareness included 27 questions conducted with 250 telephone interviews.

*Any Time, Any Place* was launched in 2006. The post-assessment contained 21 original, two modified, and six additional questions about physical activity levels, opportunities, and perceived barriers guiding the next campaign. After *Any Time, Any Place*, 252 telephone interviews were conducted. *Join the Movement* was launched in 2007, was assessed in 2008 with 29 original and 13 additional questions regarding barriers to walking (access to and maintenance of trails and sidewalks, traffic, lighting). After *Join the Movement*, a total of 329 telephone interviews were conducted.

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0749-3797/\$36.00

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2012.07.004>

## Results

### Campaigns 1 and 2

Eighty-six percent of participants wanted to be part of a more-active community for their children/grandchildren's improved health. These data shaped the 2006 *Any Time, Any Place* campaign targeting families. When asked how they would rate opportunities in the community for themselves and their family to be active, 40% felt there were more opportunities compared to 2 years ago. Results shaped AO's final campaign, which served as a call to action.

### Campaign 3

*Join the Movement* was launched with a photography series of Omahans being active and a business toolkit providing consistent active-living messages. Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported "good" or "very good" to describe their perception of Omaha as a more-active community, a 14% increase from the baseline assessment. The reason was an investment in infrastructure and increased active-living opportunities. Higher-income residents (>\$100,000) were more likely to rate the community as "very good" (44%) compared to those with incomes <\$50,000 (22%). Thirty-nine percent of respondents reported being "a little more active" and "much more active" this year (2008) than last year.

Additional findings: 62.6% of respondents reported recreational trails near their neighborhood, a 75% increase in higher-income neighborhoods, and a drop to 44.6% in lower-income neighborhoods. Most (76.6%) reported having access to sidewalks; however, higher-income neighborhoods were twice as likely as lower-income neighborhoods (28.7%) to strongly agree (61.9%) that they were well maintained. An important finding was that physical activity increased by 20% from 2005 to 2007.<sup>4</sup>

## Discussion

Focused, consistent messaging is recommended as a key strategy to promote physical activity.<sup>5</sup> Utilizing pre/post campaign surveys allowed AO to target subpopulations (families, worksites) with focused messaging. As a result, there was an improvement in community perception of physical activity opportunities and self-reported physical activity.

### Study Limitations

Limitations to this study include (1) use of nonstandard physical activity measures to assess physical activity due to the survey being focused on marketing versus public

health parameters; (2) the self-report nature of the survey, which has inherent limitations (interpretation, memory); (3) the cross-sectional design of the survey, which makes it impossible to suggest that the campaign efforts of AO were exclusively responsible for the positive shifts in perception and behavior. Future evaluation warrants the assessment of changes in behaviors over time in addition to knowledge and perception.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

Activate Omaha's 3-year campaign was not static; instead, it took findings from each campaign to shape subsequent campaigns, targeting populations such as families and worksites. Original funding for the media campaign, totaling \$185,000, was provided by a local hospital trust fund. As a result of the media campaign, an additional \$1,450,000 was leveraged from funding provided by private foundations and local corporations. This allowed AO to be recognized by the community, private corporations, and funders as the avenue to lead sustainable change and to serve as a model and guide for other communities.

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Publication of this article was supported by several grants: an ALbD grant (49754); a special opportunity grant (55569); and a sustainability grant (65273) from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The authors are grateful for the assistance and support of the Alegent Community Benefit Trust, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska, Emspace Group, Carroll Communications, and the Area Health Consortium. The authors acknowledge Active Living by Design for its support throughout the grant cycle. The authors also acknowledge all members of the AO Leadership Team for their expertise, guidance, and dedication to making Omaha a healthier community.

No financial disclosures were reported by the authors of this paper.

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