

Programs and Promotions

Approaches by 25 Active Living by Design Partnerships

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Background: From 2003 to 2008, a total of 25 community partnerships funded through Active Living by Design (ALbD) implemented physical activity programs and promotions as part of integrated approaches complementing policy and environment changes.

Purpose: This paper reviews the partnerships' efforts with respect to promotions and programs, the breadth and depth of these types of approaches, challenges, successes, and lessons learned.

Methods: Through a mixed-methods approach, including interviews, focus groups, and web-based tracking, multiple sources of data were collected and analyzed from 2006 to 2010. Evaluators summarized quantitative data by counts or means and qualitative results using systematic coding procedures to identify themes, ideas, and concepts.

Results: All 25 community partnerships were engaged in programs and promotions of varying degrees throughout the initiative. Programs were categorized as community walking and biking programs, school programs, afterschool programs, and worksite programs, among others. Promotional strategies were categorized as social marketing campaigns, media, events, and communications. The most common programs included Safe Routes to School, walking clubs, and Bike/Walk to School Day. Media efforts were undertaken by all 25 partnerships, totaling 2659 TV, newspaper, and radio hits.

Conclusions: Programs and promotions can be resource-intensive and have limited population impact when offered in isolation; however, these strategies help connect people to their environments (e.g., increase awareness of facilities, provide social support for use of facilities) in order to improve physical activity behaviors.

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Introduction

Over the past 2 decades, a host of community-based interventions to increase awareness, knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to physical activity have emerged in the public health field.^{1–3} In these interventions, the programmatic and promotional strategies are easy to implement in a short timeframe, are tailored and targeted to specific populations and settings, and are evidence-based. Although promotional strategies are highly effective in raising awareness about the need to be physically active, they have been less effective in changing

physical activity behavior.^{4–6} Likewise, health education programs have been shown to increase knowledge and skills with respect to being active, with limited ability to sustain physical activity behavior over time.^{1,7–10}

Given these strengths and shortcomings, programmatic and promotional strategies can complement broader initiatives to create and sustain physical activity behavior at the population scale through the inclusion of efforts to change the policies or environments within which individuals and communities reside.^{11–13} Policies and environments can provide the space and resources necessary to increase and sustain physical activity behavior. In turn, programmatic and promotional strategies can increase awareness of or education about policy and environmental changes, and they can provide support and encouragement to maximize use of environments and resources. Therefore, current efforts to increase population levels of physical activity reflect the need to incorporate integrated approaches in their design.^{14–16}

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To integrate programs and promotions with environment and policy changes, 25 communities were awarded grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2003 as part of the Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative (www.activelivingbydesign.org). With 5 years of funding for a maximum of \$200,000 per community, these partnerships intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines, through innovative approaches to community design, public policies, and communication strategies.¹⁷

The ALbD's Community Action Model provided five strategies to influence community change (5Ps): preparation, promotions, programs, policy influences, and physical projects.¹⁸ The 5Ps represent an integrated, comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through cross-sector, multidisciplinary partnerships working across many settings and populations. Best practices from many of these partnerships have been reported in a previous supplement to the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine (AJPM)*.¹⁹ Although the partnerships integrated all 5Ps within their initiatives, this paper focuses solely on the partnerships' efforts with respect to promotions and programs, the breadth and depth of these types of approaches, challenges, successes, and lessons learned.

Methods

A 3-year evaluation began toward the end of the third year of funding for the ALbD partnerships (November 2006). Evaluation activities conducted from 2006 to 2010 (described in detail in companion papers^{20,21} in this *AJPM* supplement) focused on three primary aims: (1) to assess the environmental impacts of physical projects and policy changes; (2) to document intervention strategies implemented, as well as intended and unintended consequences; and (3) to identify strengths and challenges in planning, developing, and implementing interventions.

Using a mixed-methods approach, investigators analyzed data collected before site visits (key informant interviews); during site visits (focus groups); and over the course of the initiative (Progress Reporting System).^{22,23} Quantitative results summarized counts (e.g., walking programs, media hits), and qualitative results were analyzed using focused coding procedures to identify themes derived from the data. Themes were organized into categories through discussions with the partnerships, the evaluation national advisory group, and ALbD National Program Office and RWJF staff.^{24–26}

This process allowed themes that did not fit into predetermined categories to emerge. Later, these themes formed the basis for a systematic qualitative coding procedure using Atlas.ti to ensure consistency in the analysis of programmatic and promotional approaches across the 25 partnerships. A matrix was developed to summarize each theme (e.g., social marketing campaign, passport program) by ALbD partnership (e.g., Jackson MI, Nashville TN).

Results

All 25 community partnerships were engaged in programs and promotions of varying degrees throughout the initiative. Programs and promotions were best catego-

rized into the following: community walking and biking programs; school programs; afterschool programs; work-site programs; social marketing campaigns; media; and other programs, events, and communications (Table 1).

Table 1. Types and frequencies of ALbD programs and promotions

Strategies	Number of ALbD partnerships
Media (TV, radio, newspaper)	25
Safe routes to school	15
Walking clubs	13
Bike/walk to school day	13
Presentations/press conferences	13
Festivals/carnivals/fairs	12
Social marketing campaigns	11
Bicycle recycle and donations	9
Bike-riding events	9
Wellness programs	8
Walking school bus/bike train	7
Bike safety and education	6
Physical education and wellness programs	5
Wellness/fitness classes	5
Prescription program	4
Bike club	3
Passport program	3
Safety classes	3
Greenway stewardship	3
Physical activities and education	3
Active transportation program or events	3
Errand bike program	2
Bike education training	2
University courses and education classes	2
Safety program	2
Basketball league	2
Bike club	2
Greenway stewards	1
Community wellness	1
Car-free challenge	1
Bike share	1
Track	1
Weight management	1

ALbD, Active Living by Design

Community Walking and Biking Programs and Promotions

Community walking and biking programs helped specific populations build social support for physical activity. In some communities, walking programs supplemented community assessment efforts or offered deterrence to crime by placing eyes and feet on the street. While community-wide walking programs have been around for many years, community-wide biking programs were considered new and open to innovation. Examples of community-wide biking programs included specific bicycle events (e.g., bike to school or work days, bike rodeos); bicycle recycle programs (i.e., rehabilitation of old bikes combined with skill-building repair classes); bicycle sharing programs; and traditional bicycle safety and skills training courses. An important aspect to the success of these programs was adaptation to the community's interests or demands.

Fifteen partnerships implemented a walking program of some kind (e.g., walking clubs, safety programs). For some walking programs, pedometers and maps were provided. The bicycle recycle programs were instituted in nine partnerships and represented an excellent opportunity to engage youth in skill-building, entrepreneurship, and income-generating opportunities. Within these programs, spare bicycle parts were donated, and bicycles were repaired and then distributed to those in need, often to youth and lower-income individuals.

Another common biking program, organized group rides, took place in nine communities. Other bicycling programs implemented by partnerships included bike safety and education programs (six partnerships); bike

clubs (three partnerships); and a bike share program (one partnership). Several walking and biking programs incorporated safety training or promotional materials such as signs, brochures, posters, and flyers.

Thirteen partnerships implemented walking clubs. The Bronx partnership hosted the History of Hunts Point Walking Club, which integrated local history into the walking tour and engaged community members to discuss historical aspects of their community. The Isanti County MN partnership collaborated with "Faithfully Fit," a nondenominational faith-based program combining physical activity, healthy eating, and meditation, to offer a senior walking program with nearly 30 older-adult participants.

Buffalo Blue Bikes in Buffalo NY, a seasonal, membership-only bike share program, utilized a series of hubs located throughout the city. Members could check out or return bikes that were donated by police departments and repaired by youth (www.buffalobluebicycle.org). Kalihi Valley Instruction and Bike Exchange (K-VIBE) in Honolulu HI has produced approximately 400 bikes each year and distributed approximately 600 helmets, serving an at-risk, hard-to-engage population: middle-school boys.

School Programs and Promotions

Among the 25 partnerships, 15 engaged in Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programming to increase active transportation opportunities for children. Thirteen partnerships, many of whom were implementing SRTS efforts, also held periodic bike/walk to school day events, whereas seven partnerships initiated Walking School Buses and

Table 2. Media impact of ALbD promotions, based on market size

Media promotions	Albuquerque NM	Bronx NY	Buffalo NY	Chapel Hill NC	Charleston SC	Chicago IL	Cleveland OH	Columbia MO	Denver CO	Honolulu HI	Isanti County MN	Jackson MI
Media market ranking (1–210)	44	1	52	26	97	3	18	137	16	71	— ^a	— ^b
Newspaper/magazine	17	8	2	89	6	6	28	188	19	14	94	55
TV	6	7	3	22	2	0	4	63	0	28	1	58
Radio	184	1	0	39	1	0	1	139	0	1	9	14
Total	207	16	5	150	9	6	33	390	19	43	104	127

(continued on next page)

Note: Media market ranking is done by AC Nielsen and is calculated by the number of TV households in each market; estimates used throughout the 2009–2010 TV season, effective September 21, 2009. Source: Nielsen Media Research, Inc.

^aIsanti County MN was not ranked, although it exists on the outskirts of the Minneapolis–St. Paul media market (ranked at 15).

^bJackson MI was not ranked, although it is located on the outskirts of Lansing MI media market (ranked at 115).

^cUpper Valley (Hanover NH, Norwich VT) was not ranked, although it is located on the far outskirts of Burlington VT (ranked at 94).

^dWinnebago NE was not ranked, although it is located between Sioux City SD (ranked 113) and Omaha NE (ranked 76).

Bike Trains. These efforts were supplemented in three partnerships with safety classes instructing children in the importance of walking and biking to school safely. Other school programs that were implemented by partnerships included bike education training (two partnerships); greenway stewardship programs, where children learned gardening; clean-up and restoration of green spaces (three partnerships); and general physical education and wellness programming (five partnerships).

Some partnerships gained momentum through SRTS for broader active living initiatives outside of the school (Sacramento CA, Jackson). Others succeeded in taking on SRTS responsibilities at the local and national level (Cleveland OH, Columbia MO). However, some SRTS programs did not get sustained attention because of lack of parent or school official support (Denver CO).

The SRTS program in Chapel Hill NC garnered parental support in three different schools. Based on Active Routes to School training, one parent headed up the SRTS program and became a community leader. The success at several schools raised the attention of the mayor and city officials, resulting in a new crossing light in front of one elementary school to better improve the environment for walking.

Slavic Village in Cleveland had an SRTS launch that attracted citywide attention, with the mayor participating. Five days of bike safety were completed at Bike Rodeos in five Charleston SC schools, with more than 600 students being trained. During the rodeos, participants were fitted for bicycle helmets and learned how to do basic bike maintenance. Seven partnerships implemented programming for youth in afterschool pro-

grams, including such activities as track, weight management, basketball, bike clubs, and general physical activity education.

Worksite Programs and Promotions

About half of the ALbD initiatives ($n=13$) had programs centered on promoting more-active transportation (i.e., mass transit, biking, walking) to work. These included promoting national Bike To Work Week, assisting employers in supporting bicycle commuting, providing maps and transit schedules to employees to encourage active transportation to the workplace, and implementing active transportation events (e.g., interbusiness competitions, prizes, recognition). Likewise, two partnerships initiated errand bike programs, where employees were able to use bikes to run errands during the middle of the workday. Eight partnerships created or modified employer wellness programs, including walking clubs, lunch and learns, screenings, and fitness buddies. Some partnerships formed wellness committees to maintain programming within the worksite, and others provided incentives for participation in programs, such as pedometers and apparel.

In Jackson, Smart Commute Day promoted walking, biking, and transit in the daily commute, including interbusiness competition, prizes, and free breakfast. In Omaha NE, the Bicycle Commuter Challenge was successful in its 14-week period, with almost 700 participants logging 129,504 miles. Go Chapel Hill developed an Active Business toolkit that included bike/pedestrian maps, pedometers, a 10,000-steps program

Table 2. (continued)

Louisville KY	Nashville TN	Oakland CA	Omaha NE	Orlando FL	Portland OR	Sacramento CA	Santa Ana CA	Seattle WA	Somerville MA	Upper Valley VT/NH	Wilkes-Barre PA	Winnebago NE	TOTAL
49	29	6	76	19	22	21	2	13	7	— ^c	54	— ^d	
18	20	3	116	4	6	26	2	12	6	111	23	18	891
14	13	0	69	7	1	101	1	7	1	4	2	2	416
1	802	0	146	0	3	9	0	2	0	0	0	0	1352
33	835	3	331	11	10	136	3	21	7	115	25	20	2659

In a top-20 media market

In a smaller media market

ALbD, Active Living by Design

guide, transit guides, and a menu for healthy living daily tips.

Social Marketing Campaigns

Social marketing is the systematic application of marketing, along with other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioral goals for a social good.²⁷ True social marketing campaigns require specific audience targeting, message testing, and an investment of time and resources to ensure the campaign is successful. When these criteria are considered, very few true social marketing campaigns were launched among ALbD partnerships, with the ALbD National Program Office opting to use the term *audience-centered communications* instead. Eleven of the partnerships actively engaged in these types of campaigns, with varying levels of complexity. Some were smaller in scale, focusing on a targeted population with a specific method and message, whereas others used billboards, buses, radio, and TV in their design.

In Albuquerque NM, “Take A Walk” was designed for a neighborhood with a large Hispanic population with practical and relevant messages printed on magnets in English and Spanish. In Omaha, a social marketing toolkit was sent to local businesses, containing break-room posters, newsletter content, and payroll stuffers. The Orlando partnership designed and implemented a campaign, “Reasons to Get Active,” including the following: ads promoting walking, biking, and playing in the local African-American newspaper (circulation 7000); a Downtown User’s Guide; “e-blasts” from the city promoting being active in downtown; point-of-decision prompts posted in the city hall; 36 large promotional banners placed throughout the downtown area; a downtown circular bus with a Get Active Orlando message; and a website (www.getactiveorlando.com) for more information.

Media

Media coverage was an integral part of all the partnerships. Across the 25 partnerships, there were 891 newspaper items, 416 TV spots, and 1352 radio hits (Table 2). Blogs or other forms of social media were not included in the data collection process. Media coverage throughout the grant period varied across partnerships. Nashville, Columbia, Omaha, and Albuquerque documented hundreds of media events over the course of the funding period. Partnerships in rural or smaller communities had more media coverage than partnerships in larger cities. Some partnerships were regular guests on the radio or hosted their own radio shows on active living and health issues. A handful of partnerships with greater communications capacity were seen as a resource on active living,

while others simply used the media to promote their events and activities.

The Buffalo partnership, led by a major medical institution, held press conferences and press events to highlight its progress and keep the community up-to-date on its activities. Activate Omaha used targeted media campaigns as a central part of its initiative, with a focus on “everyday citizens engaged in everyday physical activity” (e.g., billboards, newspaper ads, public service announcements). The Tufts Shape Up Somerville grant activities brought the Somerville MA experience to national audiences through *The Wall Street Journal*, The Associated Press, Nightline News, and CNN. In addition, a documentary about the dangers of obesity (*Killer at Large*) highlighted Somerville’s approach as a solution to the obesity crisis. With limited success getting media attention for pedestrian safety, the Seattle WA partnership decided a chicken suit would attract attention and go along with the cliché of “Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road?” This public campaign caught the media’s attention and became a popular and unexpected promotional tool, gaining both national and local attention.

Other Programs, Events, and Communications

General wellness and fitness programs were implemented in five partnerships, including dancing, wrestling, walking, yoga, aerobics, and jumping rope. In four partnerships, physicians and other healthcare providers prescribed physical activity to their patients, using traditional prescription forms. Three partnerships started a passport program, where participants received a passport booklet and “stamps” for engaging in various activities throughout the community, such as fitness classes and neighborhood scavenger hunts.

Presentations and conferences were held to share and promote the initiative to a broader constituency (13 partnerships). Festivals, carnivals, parties, and fairs raised community awareness about the benefits of physical activity and brought in large crowds of participants (12 partnerships). Similarly, hosting a walk, race, or ride resonated well with communities and garnered much success in building energy and enthusiasm over being active (nine partnerships). A special day, week, or month was recognized for active living, such as America on the Move Day and Healthy Transportation Day (nine partnerships).

Communications took many forms, most commonly newsletters and e-newsletters (16 partnerships). The Internet was used frequently, with 15 partnerships developing websites to promote their efforts and provide information to the community. Eleven partnerships



Figure 1. Active Living by Design community partnership logos

developed maps, walking guides, and transit schedules to distribute to community members to encourage walking, biking, and transit use as alternate modes of transportation.

Eleven partnerships developed various brochures, flyers, and posters to advertise active living messaging in the community, and five partnerships developed resource guides, toolkits, and manuals. Nineteen partnerships developed a new brand/logo to establish their identity in the community (Figure 1 provides a collage of partnership logos developed from this initiative). Other programs, events, or communications implemented by the partnerships included university courses and education classes, greenway stewards, car-free challenges, creating apparel and incentives for distribution, videos, calendars, banners, billboards, and environmental art.

Discussion

The 25 ALbD partnerships had many achievements and faced a number of obstacles in implementing their programmatic and promotional strategies. Several implications from this work are summarized below.

New programs were expensive and difficult to sustain. Programs focused on individual behavior change were

resource-intensive to support and difficult to sustain without additional resources (e.g., Safe Routes to School grants) or integration into the work of existing partners (e.g., sports, recreational, public health programs). Programs had a greater likelihood of implementation when they were sponsored or led by organizations with stable funding and consistent volunteer involvement.

Partnerships adapting programs to community circumstances and needs helped to ensure that programs were culturally appropriate (e.g., supported by traditions, conducted in a native language); fully accessible (e.g., literacy, time, cost, place); and responsive to community conditions (e.g., crime, weather). Other elements of successful programs included being informed by the community, demonstrating strong community participation, and being adopted by the local government or other community organizations as an ongoing program not dependent on grant funding. Community engagement and capitalizing on community assets may strengthen the impact and longevity of active living programs.

Short-term incentives were not enough to change routine behavior, yet incentives often played an important role in increasing and maintaining participation in events and programs. Programs relying too heavily on giveaways and other product-oriented incentives found it

more difficult to encourage sustained behavior when these incentives were no longer enticing or available. On the other hand, social benefits were motivating, particularly for individuals with low self-efficacy and few social supports. Sustainable incentives that cultivate intrinsic motivation (e.g., meeting social needs) may be necessary to maintain participation over time, and the cost of these incentives should be incorporated into planning for sustainability.

Program participants were often able to identify needs for new or improved facilities, more-supportive policies, or more-effective messages during the normal course of their participation. They represented a highly credible constituency for improving outreach and advocacy efforts, if adequately encouraged to think critically about their experiences and follow through with their ideas. Likewise, many partnerships successfully recruited local reputable media companies to be members of the partnership, which improved the frequency and quality of coverage of their messages. Yet other partnerships spent time and energy raising awareness of their efforts through the media, only to be disappointed when a given reporter did not fully convey their active living messages. Program participants and partnerships with media companies and outlets may help to build a constituency for broader community change.

Successes

Across the 25 ALBD partnerships, some common themes emerged that help paint the picture of successes and challenges experienced by these diverse partnerships in implementing their programs and promotions.

Strong leadership. Motivating and trusted leaders within the community helped to ensure active participation and engagement. For instance, teachers or instructors in Chapel Hill, Denver, and Santa Ana CA served as good role models for youth.

Adaptability and accessibility to various audiences. The ability to adapt programs and promotions to the community as well as making activities accessible to various audiences served each partnership well. As an example, Activate Omaha catered to the interests of employees (e.g., bicycle commuter challenge); children (e.g., Keystone Gateway to Active Living program); and community members (e.g., “Caught in the Act”).

Connections to media. Having a connection to local media served to promote and validate partnership efforts, and allowed them to reach large and diverse audiences. Smaller communities, such as Isanti County and Jackson, had great success in engaging local media to devote coverage to the

partnerships and their projects as well as to change how residents viewed active living (evidence for Isanti County only).

Integrating promotions and programs with physical project and policy efforts. By utilizing programs and promotions to enhance support for physical projects and policies, partnerships were able to see great accomplishments in building an active living movement. For instance, staff from the Bronx found an increase in park usage following their social marketing campaign and Wilkes-Barre PA partners observed that it was not sufficient to build the trails, as promotion of the trails brought people to the trails.

Positive outcomes. Perhaps most notably, programs and promotions served as a vehicle to influence knowledge, attitudes, skills, behavior, and health outcomes related to physical activity. The Honolulu biking program, for example, not only provided a safe and productive place for youth suspended from school, it also created a sense that biking was “cool.”

Challenges

Lack of participation. The most common challenge faced by a majority of the partnerships was insufficient participation. Several partnerships attributed lack of parental involvement as a barrier to children’s participation in programs. Some suggested it hindered the success of the Safe Routes to School program (Albuquerque) and others stated that parents had limited time outside of work to engage with their kids in programs (Cleveland, Winnebago NE). In a few communities, some employers resisted participation as they had to be convinced of the benefits of increasing activity in the work environment (Chapel Hill). Thus, programs that are convenient (e.g., location, time of day) and lower in cost may be more likely to increase participation.

Staff, resource, and funding limitations. Insufficient staff time made it difficult to maintain programmatic and promotional efforts over time. Insufficient funding and resources limited the sustainability of active living programs. For instance, a lack of staff, funding, and resources restricted the reach of programs and caused discontent among parents and residents in areas not receiving programs (Chicago). To overcome this challenge, partnerships attempted to institutionalize programming in the community and recruit volunteers (Orlando FL, Chapel Hill).

Negative media. Although the media was an asset to many partnerships, it was also a barrier to their messaging in some cases. For instance, partnerships (Bronx, Cleveland, Columbia) cited the lack of local media in larger urban communities, the lack of bilingual media, substantial air time for negative media messages (e.g., crime incidents), or stories contrary to

the active living movement (e.g., biking accidents). Building relationships with local media and supplying media personnel with ample stories, messages, and information may help to address some of these challenges.

Building relationships with schools. Working with school districts or individual schools presented some obstacles to progress in some communities. Whether it was changes in school administration staff, difficulty gaining access to the appropriate staff to support program implementation, or inconsistent communications with teachers that have many competing demands for their time (Cleveland, Nashville, Upper Valley NH/VT), the partnerships struggled at times to keep programs up and running. In Oakland, the lead agency partnered closely with the schools to support a variety of programs and services (e.g., English as a Second Language classes for parents), and staff from the lead agency had offices in the schools. This close collaboration not only cultivated close ties with the schools but the parents were also very engaged.

Safety and crime concerns. Safety concerns corresponded to physical safety from traffic and interpersonal safety related to crime and violence. These concerns prevented community residents from participating or allowing their children to participate in programs, including Safe Routes to School, Walking School Buses, adult walking or biking programs, and community events. Although many partnerships were prepared to address physical safety concerns related to traffic (e.g., reduced speed limits, traffic calming), they expressed feeling ill-equipped to address barriers related to crime and violence. The prevalence of these concerns suggests that interventions to reduce crime and violence are a high priority.

Climate. Many communities faced climate obstacles that kept programs from reaching their full potential. For northern communities, long, cold winters required innovative active living programming (e.g., ice skating loops, ski trails). In contrast, the hot sun in southern communities necessitated lots of shade trees along walking routes, canopies and covered shelters for parks and playgrounds, and other amenities to provide relief to active residents (e.g., drinking fountains, pools, water-related play areas).

Conclusion

Through the use of programs and promotions, ALbD partnerships were able to raise awareness and increase participation in short-term activities within their targeted populations. Although programs and promo-

tions can be resource-intensive and have limited impact when offered in isolation, they help to connect individuals to their environments to support active living. Although many community change efforts may have concentrated primarily on policy and environmental changes, the programmatic and promotional activities were able to enhance the success of these other strategies. As a result, “if you build it, let them know about it, and offer programming, then they will come back again and again.”

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