



Denver, CO

▲ Community Example from Chapter 1 of "Lessons for Leaders:"
Lessons in Community Capacity Building

Community Background

In Southwest Denver, several very young, majority-Latino neighborhoods have extremely low adult educational attainment and a high incidence of health disparities. Residents lack sufficient access to affordable, healthy foods and quality facilities for physical activity.

Community Action

Led by Denver Public Health and partners such as Live Well Westwood, the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) partnership used multiple assessment methods to successfully engage community residents and organizations, build relationships with agency partners and secure powerful results. A wide variety of active partners worked on an array of assessment activities, including preference surveys, focus groups, pedestrian and bicycle counts, environmental audits, public listening sessions, issue forums and public-design meetings. Instead of simply relying on agencies to collect data and hold traditional outreach events, these joint assessment methods trained emerging resident leaders, built new networks of relationships and supported inclusive decision making. This improved meeting participation and unearthed new problem-solving methods. It also influenced the timing, design and investment in plans, policies and capital projects.

For example, Revision International contracted with Denver Public Health to utilize ten promotoras for outreach and to perform environmental audits in the West Denver community. Promotoras used a survey method to gather resident input on how walking

and biking could improve at Weir Gulch, a proposed linear park. As community members, they were able to connect with residents to increase their participation, involvement and implementation of various goals in the HKHC work plan. Other community partners worked to develop, distribute and share results of community surveys and host multiple public meetings that informed the design of the new Cuatros Vientos (Four Winds) Park.

The resident interest and credibility developed through this process transferred to other settings and projects. A sustainability workshop related to parks became an opportunity for a resident leader to inform Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR) leaders that too many residents still did not understand the opportunity presented by the Weir Gulch project. This encouraged DPR to slow down its own Master Drainage Plan and take more time engaging the community. A discussion of park activation at the final HKHC partnership meeting revealed strong demand and opportunity for a recreation center that is now being pursued by DPR, The Trust for Public Land and community partners such as Live Well Westwood and Westwood Unidos. A park forum validated consensus about moving forward to obtain a dedicated funding stream for Denver parks.

Denver Public Health staff also found that rich local data was extremely effective in helping to communicate their message to elected officials. The staff used it to conduct mapping by city council districts, to provide city-council-district-specific reports and to inform newsletter articles on childhood obesity. Regular exchange of data with agency and community partners further developed those relationships and was a key part of capacity building.