



New Orleans, LA

▲ Community Example from Chapter 4 of “Lessons for Leaders:”
Lessons in Advancing Policy/Systems Change

Community Background

New Orleans, the largest city in Louisiana, is still recovering from the storm surge of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. By 2009, infrastructure and population displacement continued to present opportunities and challenges to rebuild a city that would support healthy eating and active living. New Orleans had long struggled with a variety of health equity concerns, including childhood obesity. The Tulane University Prevention Research Center furthered its impact and reach by expanding its partnership through a *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) grant. The center established KidsWalk Coalition to improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in order to make walking and bicycling a safe option for children and families.

Community Action

KidsWalk Coalition, a diverse multidisciplinary partnership, included active participation and representation from local businesses, city and state government agencies, local elected officials, community-based organizations, schools, youth organizations, and policy and advocacy organizations. The partnership had a unique relationship with the Department of Public Works (DPW). Both the HKHC Project Coordinator and Transportation Planner were physically located in DPW and were able to facilitate and expedite requests for improvements from advocates and residents. They were also able to more efficiently monitor the implementation of projects. With a major focus on active transportation, they generated reports on school site assessments, Safe Routes to School funding for sidewalk and connectivity improvements, signage and other streetscapes. They also served as catalysts for building trust and engagement among residents to support active living.

In December 2011, the City of New Orleans passed a Complete Streets policy, a first for the state of Louisiana. This policy provided direction for the DPW in addressing the needs of all users of streets and sidewalks when making improvements to city infrastructure, including planning for cyclists, pedestrians, transit users and motorists when upgrading or planning new streets. This was a major accomplishment. It was the first time the city had ever invited community partners and coalition members to be involved in developing policy. The city developed an advisory committee, consisting of representatives from city agencies, citywide nonprofit organizations, the City Planning Commission, the New Orleans Health Department, KidsWalk Coalition, DPW and the Louisiana Public Health Institute.

KidsWalk Coalition members were instrumental in achieving this victory and soon realized that policy adoption was only the first stage of the work. Efforts to sustain the policy through implementation and beyond is critical. The DPW Director immediately convened an oversight committee, responsible for refining the guidelines for implementation. Unfortunately, after adoption of the policy, a critical ally within DPW left the agency, providing little time for transition. However, KidsWalk was positioned so that the staff replacement would see the value of the initiative. Partnership leaders continue to support DPW with tracking systems, which assist the office in responding to ongoing requests for infrastructure improvements. With policy implementation efforts underway, KidsWalk Coalition continues to maintain a critical mass of diverse advocates for ensuring long-term follow through.