Identifying Stakeholders and Strategic Partners to Catalyze Change

While the benefits of a more walkable community are clear, a more difficult task is to obtain consensus on how and what should be done to achieve a safer, more accessible, and more attractive atmosphere for pedestrians. A comprehensive approach is needed to improve the pedestrian environment. How can a community join forces to address pedestrian issues and problems? How should a community decide whether improvements are needed and what solutions should be implemented? The next section discusses how to develop broad-based support for a healthy living initiative, identify stakeholders, strategic partnerships, an advisory committee, and policies and plans for a pedestrian-friendly community.

Stakeholder Identification and Analysis

In order to determine who will be impacted by the proposed planning effort or walkability project, stakeholders need to be identified. In other words, who will be most affected by the planning effort or walkability project? Stakeholders are those individuals who have either a negative or positive stake in the success of the project. A list needs to be made of all external stakeholders from the community at large as well as internal stakeholders, who are generally representatives of the entity involved in the planning process. To determine the most appropriate forum to assemble stakeholders, core values or beliefs held by stakeholders need to be assessed to anticipate possible reactions to proposed plans and balance the diverse needs of community members (ICMA and NLC, p. 53 - 55).

Stakeholders should be involved in and throughout an effort to improve the walkability of the community. Identifying and engaging the right people in a community process or project can be the difference between a project’s success and failure. Stakeholders can be either individuals or groups of people that:

- Will be impacted by development of policies or plans to enhance walkability.
- Have information, experience, or insight to develop policies or plans.
- Have power or a position of leadership to either support or block progress of policies/plans.
- Have a vested interest in the outcomes.
- Are final decision makers or people who must approve the plan.
- May support or impede implementation of policies/plans.
- Have been champions or critics of your work in the past (or perhaps both).
- Are considered visionary thinkers.
- Can win consensus within a group setting.
Powerful stakeholders will help build consensus for project support, leverage resources, and influence or engage others. Stakeholders may include citizens, civic associations, elected officials, municipal employees, planning and transportation officials, the business community, property owners, homeowner associations, public health officials, educators, schools and students, environmentalists, historical committees, scouts, faith-based organizations, chambers of commerce, tourist bureaus, bicycle and trail organizations, and design professionals including transportation engineers/planners, engineers, landscape architects, architects, land-use planners, or other design professionals.

**Strategic Partnerships**

Strategic partnerships are also critical for generating support, expertise, resources, and volunteers to address active living initiatives of a community. Public agencies, institutions of higher learning, civic associations, school districts, local governments, state and county health departments, fitness organizations, philanthropic foundations, nonprofit service or health organizations, medical associations, and corporations may actively collaborate on fundraising, facility design, or programming initiatives to accomplish what no single municipality or organization can. The checklist below can be used as a guide to establish strategic partnerships.

**Identify Potential Partners**

Brainstorm a list of potential partners including organizations, companies, or groups that are stakeholders in the community. Try not to limit the list at first, the longer the list, the better the chance for creating successful partnerships. Think about organizations or companies whose mission is similar to what has been established for this project.

**Determine the Expected Gain from the Partnership**

Create measurable goals and objectives for evaluating the partnership. Keep a running list of these goals and objectives in case changes need to be made along the way.

**Meet with Potential Partners**

Explain the project to potential partners with enough detail to give them an idea of what is to be expected, but allow them to make suggestions and changes based on their needs as well. Ask each partner what they expect to gain from the partnership and select the group whose expectation is similar to the one created by the task force.

**Decide Roles and Responsibilities**

Clearly outline each group’s roles and responsibilities for the project in writing. Include
resources that each group will contribute (e.g., money, staff, technology, training, information and contacts) (Abele, 2003).

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation has conducted extensive research on successful collaborations. The foundation has identified twenty factors influencing collaboration success, which have been adapted and incorporated into the following checklist. Factors that contribute to the success of a partnership include (Winer and Ray):

**Environmental Factors**
- Potential partner has a history of collaboration or cooperation.
- Collaborative group is respected as a community leader.
- Political and social climate is favorable to forming a partnership.

**Membership Characteristic Factors**
- Group exhibits mutual respect, understanding, and trust.
- Partnership has an appropriate cross section of members.
- Members see collaboration benefit their self-interest.
- Organizations have ability to compromise.

**Process and Structure Factors**
- Members share a stake in both process and outcome.
- Multiple layers of participation and participation are present.
- Process and structure are flexible.
- Clear roles and policy guidelines are in place.
- Process and structure is adaptable.
- Group supports an appropriate pace of development.

**Communication Factors**
- Partners exhibit open and frequent communication.
- Relationships and communication links are established.

**Purpose Factors**
- Partnership has concrete, attainable goals and objectives.
- Partners have a shared vision.
- Partnership will serve a unique purpose in the community.

**Resources Factors**
- Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time are available to sustain the partnership.
- Partnership provides skilled leadership.

**Role of an Advisory Committee**

A task force or an advisory committee may be formed by a local government to convene citizens, stakeholders, and other representatives to develop a vision for a more walkable community and policies, plans, and programs to accomplish that vision. An advisory committee can provide unique local perspectives on diverse community interests, needs, and
priorities. An advisory committee should be comprised of stakeholders, or those individuals who have an interest in making changes to policies and the built environment through the construction of trails, sidewalks, roadway improvements, and/or site design improvements to enhance walkability. Start small, involve both internal and external stakeholders who can help build consensus for the project’s vision and who are key informants in the community. Successful advisory committees or task forces require leadership, commitment, and communication. Roles, responsibilities, and evaluation criteria need to be agreed upon and determined for each task force member. Determine how to keep channels of communication open and how conflicts will be resolved to minimize potential problems (Abele, 2003 and Pennsylvania Greenways, 2001).

**Process to Develop Policies and Plans**

To develop strategic tools, such as public policies or plans to create change, a community first needs to examine how the physical environment impacts walkability of the community. A walkability audit or assessment of a community’s walkable environment can help provide a general understanding of where pedestrian problems and issues exist. The process for collecting this data and conducting environmental assessments is described in detail in the “Planning a Pedestrian-Friendly Community,” section of this resource guide. Once data is collected, opportunities and constraints are evaluated, and a future vision is developed, strategic partners and community coalitions can work to catalyze changes in policies, practices, and plans to improve the health and physical activity of a community. Policy making and planning will provide comprehensive solutions to improve the built environment, which will enhance opportunities for walking as both a transportation mode and recreational activity. Throughout the process to make a community more pedestrian-friendly, committed leadership and active public involvement is needed. Community, political, and institutional leadership is needed to develop a unified vision for the community that can be achieved through policy making and planning. Broad, grassroots support will help build consensus and community support for policies and plans that need to be developed and ultimately adopted.