

Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities

Phase Three - Prioritization and Planning

Guidelines, Recommendations, and Adaptations Including Disability (GRAIDs)

[Karma Harris] Now as we talk about the second major activity in this phase – and the first one is really reviewing those results – the second activity of this phase involves reviewing other best practice, for example, policy, systems, and environmental change sample strategies for healthy eating, physical activity, general accessibility improvement, and tobacco use or prevention that are accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities.

And there is a lot of best practice policy, systems, and environmental lists out there, but it's really important for this project, for us, to review one that is inclusive to persons with disabilities.

But for this project, our project partners at the National Center for Health, Physical Activity, and Disability (or NCHPAD for short), they shared with us a framework that they developed, that they use, that worked out really well for our project and that framework is called the GRAIDs framework, which stands for Guidelines, Recommendations, Adaptations Including Disability. And this framework really provided a great menu of inclusive healthy eating and physical activity strategies that communities could look at and see if that aligns with their data and could plan to use on their community action plan and implement to improve the health and well-being of all the residents, which include people with disabilities.

So, our 10 communities were instructed to take their assessment results and develop an action plan. But we really felt like adding the second step in this phase was critical for getting them to start thinking about what are some of those best practices that are already out there that revolve around these healthy-living focus areas that are inclusive. And so, we had them really look at the GRAIDs tool, and I know we're going to hear a little bit about that from you.

It's really important to note, also, that we wanted our teams to use a policy, system, environmental change approach in lieu of programmatic strategies because we feel like the policy, system, environmental approaches are more impactful in terms of the number of people that they represent and potentially reach in the community, as well as are more sustainable.

And so, I'll kind of give an example here, but I'd like to give the example as I'm thinking about programs and policies, system, and environmental changes. For example, a New Year's weight loss program might target people at a worksite, and they might set it up for a few months in order to lose that holiday weight, start their year off healthy.

But a more sustainable approach might consist of the worksite developing a new policy that allows employees to take walk breaks during the day, or a systems approach that says, "You know what? We're going to pay for our employees' membership at a local gym," or, "We're going to give discounts based on them going to a gym," or an environmental change that might include construction of an onsite gym, or a placement of healthy vending throughout the workday.

So, these are examples of healthy living strategies in this worksite sector that would be more long-standing and sustainable than a simple weight loss program that might last a few months. And so with that lens in mind, Meg, as we continue talking really about this policy, system, and environmental change approach, and reviewing it against a framework like NCHPAD's GRAIDs tool, I kind of want to hear from you a little bit on your perspective about how your communities used the GRAIDs and how they benefitted from it.

So how useful do you think project partners in Butte and Helena comparing their CHII assessment results to a framework like the GRAIDs was in helping them eventually develop their action plans?

[Dr. Meg Traci] I think it was very useful. There is a saying, "You can't be an expert in your own backyard." That, I think is important to look at in this regard. I think that some of our partners might have come up with some recommendations for the projects where we started working on an inclusive approach in Butte and Helena, but I don't know that they would be able to articulate it within the framework of healthy communities in the way that GRAIDs helped us to do it. And it was really important to be able to point to this as a shared solution across the state, so we're working on these projects, or across other communities, and that we weren't alone in trying to build out Healthy Communities opportunities for people with disabilities using some recommendations that might have bubbled up locally from experts in our communities. But it was really having it articulated within the Healthy Communities framework and knowing that we were connected to other communities to do the work, and to say also, some of them seem pretty commonsense, and or the impression might be, "Oh well, we've got this covered because we have to do that." It's required in the ADA, so we will do that to move past it and say it may be required in the ADA, and you may have been trained in your professional area to adhere with the ADA, but it isn't the same as engaging a community to fulfill the vision of the ADA to truly be included.

And it was very important, I think, for us to have the GRAIDs, and the way we moved through our assessment data into what GRAIDs might be applicable, was to organize a workgroup that had been involved in conducting the CHII and then to review the GRAIDs for relevant interventions that would be helpful to the projects in those communities.

In Butte, for example, one of the GRAIDs that we identified after reviewing the CHII together with this workgroup was that the public transportation system should communicate their accessibility and accommodations policies and procedures in accessible formats on websites and stations, shelters, and vehicles; in order to facilitate access to transportation services for people with disabilities. That just got us focused on to what extent was public transportation in the transportation plan update, and how well was that represented in the needs assessment data.

And similarly, we started to look at some of the gaps in representing bike/pedi needs, in and of themselves, let alone from an inclusive approach. So, there's a GRAIDs around providing accessible paths of travel to ensure connectivity to school, residential, retail, and health services. These are basic recommendations for building out healthy communities and making sure that they're inclusive, is just really strengthening those interventions for the whole community. So, as we reviewed the GRAIDs in Butte, we started to focus on interventions that would certainly be relevant to the project that we were hoping to make inclusive, but it built up more of a sustainable policy level agenda in Butte.

And then in Helena, I would say in Helena project, the review of the GRAIDs, with again, a workgroup that had conducted the CHII, then we would bring the GRAIDs back to the broader coalition. They just really helped us to articulate for the wayfinding project; that wayfinding is... happens in a variety of ways. So, when we talk about the GRAIDs, the way it's just very specific to the wayfinding project, it says, "Provide accessible linguistically appropriate wayfinding, e.g., signage tactile and visual cues within the design and announcements within and around transportation infrastructure."

So we could, we could, talk about it and say, "No we're not just talking about Braille and we're actually talking about the way you'd design for visual cues and how you make announcements" and the whole communication plan then came into a lens of inclusivity, how do we how do we develop a communication plan? All components of the plan, and even expand the plan, so that we're providing information in accessible linguistically

appropriate ways. And we were also able to educate what that means. A community that's blind and low vision, wayfinding for them is incredibly exciting and technical. They are experts in wayfinding systems that exist using different geo-coded virtual platforms and apps, and their expertise really helped the whole coalition move forward from building out a family of physical signs, to what can we be doing in the future for wayfinding based on what the community that is blind or low vision is developing, or an application that will be more universal design for us, and, or are there ways that we can integrate some of the electronic wave finding systems into our family of signs, and we're still working on that intersection and that opportunity and that's connected us to some of the national partners.

And it's really helped us to also think about opportunities for even local projects, like where can we embed beacons and making information signs more accessible to everybody, including people who are blind or low vision. So, I would say just having that GRAID helped us to articulate this is not just about the requirements of the ADA for signage. This is about wayfinding systems need to be accessible and linguistically appropriate idea. It's a bigger topic and we are able to bring in national and local partners with very high-level expertise around Wayfinding.

[Karma Harris] So I really like hearing your perspective on how the GRAID was used by your community, but also really how a simple idea on this best practice, with this menu of options, has ended up having national reach and some examples of the inclusive walk audit that is now got to reach that much bigger than the state of Montana and the two communities Butte and Helena.

And I also really like what you said about the GRAIDs, really helped lead to more sustainable approaches and strategies that the team would eventually pursue. And I think that a framework, such as this, also sort of lends credibility and merit in the community setting. An example I think of is Butte's transportation plan update, where when something is listed in the GRAIDs, that really can augment the information that you provide to those city or county decision-makers and elected officials as they upgrade major policies, and update and make amendments to major policies like that one.