TRAILS AND PATHWAYS TO ENHANCE RECREATION AND ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

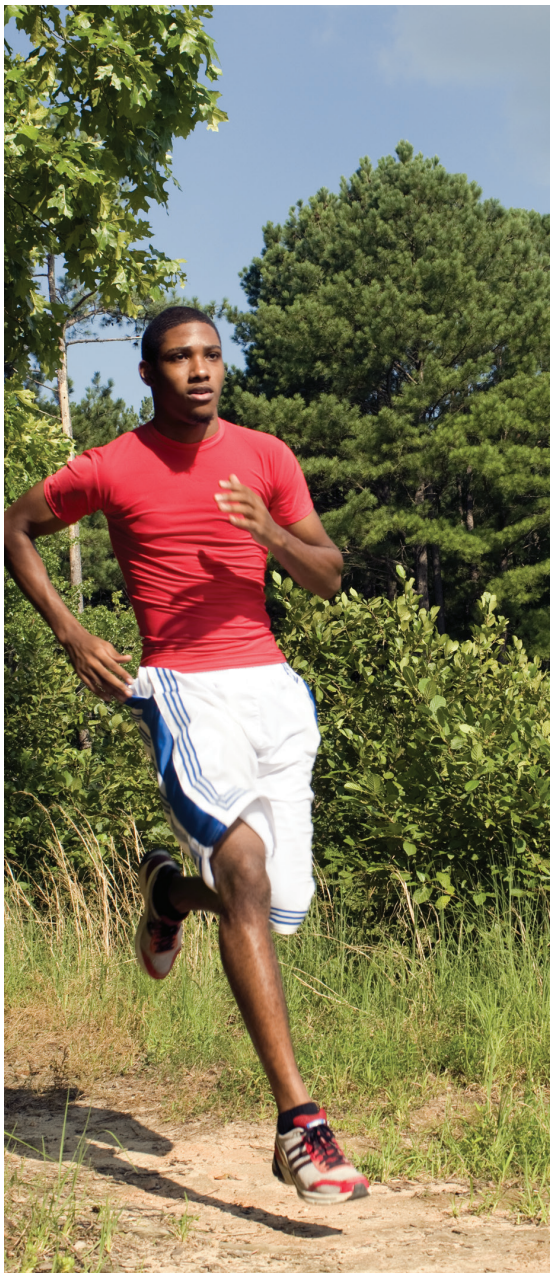
TRAILS AND PATHWAYS CAN PROVIDE A VENUE FOR RECREATIONAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AS WELL AS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION (E.G., WALKING, BIKING, USING WHEELCHAIRS) TO WORK, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES.

MAKE THE CASE:

Why Is This A Health Equity Issue?

The issues below highlight the need for trail and pathway strategies that advance health equity:

- **Limited Access to Physical Activity Resources in Many Underserved Communities:** Communities with higher poverty rates and higher proportions of people of color have been found to have few physical activity resources.[176,192] Additionally, rural communities may have less access to resources such as recreational facilities and sidewalks.[193]
- **Barriers to the Use of Trails and Pathways May Exist for Some Population Groups:** Trail use may be deterred by litter issues, excessive noise from the street, the presence of tunnels, safety concerns, and vegetation density.[194] Additionally, trail use may be challenging for older adults and people with disabilities if trails are not designed to consider their needs. For example, barriers to physical activity among these populations may include physical obstacles (e.g., narrow paths, low lighting, uneven or soft surfaces that make wheelchair use more difficult), logistical challenges (e.g., lack of transportation to facilities),[195] and poor visibility (e.g., unmarked entry points to trails).



Design and Implement with Health Equity in Mind

To maximize health impact and advance health equity, consider these factors and others when designing, implementing, and evaluating trail and pathway strategies:

KEY FACTORS	BARRIERS OR UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES	OPPORTUNITIES TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT
RESOURCE LIMITATIONS Pursue creative financing strategies and enhance existing trails and pathways in underserved communities	Developing a new trail or pathway may be unrealistic in certain communities given the complexity of the project, financial resources required, and geographic constraints.[196,197]	• Leverage land trusts to navigate the financing and real estate aspects of securing land for public good. • Pursue public-private partnerships and creative financing strategies, (e.g., railbanking, local finance measures, block grants) to support trail development. • Expand or improve existing trails, sidewalks, or paths when resources and/or physical space are limited.
COMMUNITY AWARENESS & INVOLVEMENT Engage residents in planning and monitoring decisions relevant to trails and pathways	Participation in local and regional planning processes can be a challenge due to time, logistical barriers, and the technical knowledge required for full participation.	• Partner with trusted organizations to identify residents to serve as community liaisons in planning processes. • Train community liaisons to serve as spokespeople, monitor the processes, inform others about input opportunities, and collect data as needed.
SAFETY Improve or maintain safety to maximize trail usage in underserved communities	Real or perceived concerns about safety may deter people from using trails and paths.	• Conduct ongoing maintenance (e.g., clear vegetation and trash, remove graffiti) to promote safety of paths. • Engage community groups and residents to provide long-term trail maintenance. • Use approaches such as Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)[198] to create safer environments.
SOCIAL AND OTHER SUPPORTS Provide supports that enhance trail use	Residents who have historically lacked access may not be aware of trails or may need additional support to make trail use a part of their routine.	• Develop initiatives to encourage trail use (e.g., health education initiatives, physician referrals, walking clubs). • Partner with local agencies to host events and activities that use paths and trails. • Partner with local law enforcement to promote safety. • Enhance existing trails to facilitate access between community resources (e.g., housing, transit stations, parks, schools, retail centers).

Build the Team: Partnership for Success

Successful efforts to implement trail and pathway strategies depend on bringing a diverse set of partners to the table early, consistently, and authentically. These partnerships may include the following:

- Area Agencies on Aging
- Chambers of commerce
- Community-based organizations
- Community development, revitalization, and redevelopment agencies and organizations
- Community members (of diverse abilities, ages, cultures, gender, income levels, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation)
- Faith-based organizations
- Health care systems, hospitals, community clinics, and health care providers
- Land trusts or conservancies
- Leaders and community champions from multiple sectors
- Local businesses
- Local governments
- Local department of transportation
- Local organizations of those with differing abilities
- Parks and recreation department
- Public health agencies
- Public Works Department
- Real estate developers
- Social services agencies
- State department of conservation
- State department of natural resources
- State department of transportation
- Zoning and Planning organizations

HEALTH EQUITY IN ACTION

Trails Upgraded to Better Connect People and Destinations

Mid-Ohio Valley, WV

"If you build it, they will come" did not ring true for the miles of underutilized trails in rural Mid-Ohio Valley, partly because low-income residents lacked access to these pathways. This lack of access presented a real barrier to active transportation. To understand how to promote more trail usage, the Mid-Ohio Valley Regional Health Department, with support from CDC's *Communities Putting Prevention to Work* program, conducted mapping and community assessments. Results highlighted the need for better connectivity between trails and desirable destinations, mile markers, and informative signage such as kiosks in parks with maps of trails denoting wheelchair accessibility and level of trail difficulty.

Capitalizing on the diversity of partner expertise, the health department worked with the West Virginia Parks and Recreation Department, the Regional Council, county commissioners, and others to develop a master plan with a strong emphasis on improving existing trails. Community coalitions, faith-based organizations, and youth organizations were also engaged to ensure low-income residents were engaged throughout the planning process. Community members had a vote in which trail improvements were the highest priorities. By May 2012, the master plan was adopted by five of the six counties in Mid-Ohio Valley.

Strong collaboration and leveraging funds were keys to success for implementation and sustainability. Local churches granted access to their property where portions of the trails crossed. In Pleasants County, the health department partnered with the Department of Education to connect the county's elementary school track to a nearby community and nursing home for public use. Smaller communities dealing with budgetary restraints were able to leverage Complete Streets policy and transportation enhancement efforts for trail improvements.

Community residents in Jefferson County, AL engage in development of the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System Master Plan.
Photo courtesy of Freshwater Land Trust.

Trails and Pathways Increase Connectivity for All in Alabama

Jefferson County, AL

A mapping assessment showed that many people lacked access to places for physical activity in Jefferson County—a jurisdiction in Alabama with many African American and low-income populations. Residents experiencing the highest rates of chronic disease and the lowest levels of activity live in neighborhoods where connectivity to trails and greenways was limited.

To address this lack of access, Freshwater Land Trust (FWLT), a local greenway conservation organization teamed up with the Health Action Partnership and the Jefferson County Department of Health to lead development of the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System Master Plan. These efforts were supported by CDC's *Communities Putting Prevention to Work* program. Collaborating with established community organizations helped to drive the project's success. Churches spread the word to congregations about opportunities to be involved in planning, and a consulting firm with deep community connections facilitated stakeholder meetings in the smallest towns in the county. Over 40 meetings were held at convenient and neutral locations including churches, local museums, city halls, and the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham—the largest city in the county. An online interactive map provided opportunities to participate and add suggestions virtually.

Over 3,000 residents contributed suggestions in the development of the Master Plan, which connects more than 200 miles of greenways and trails to nearby homes, schools, churches, and businesses. Wendy Jackson, Executive Director of FWLT underscored the impact of the community-driven planning process: "If you want to know where people want to walk but there is no trail, you have to ask them. There were many connections that would not have been made if it were not for [community participation]." The coalition's "Our One Mile" planning process inspired residents, businesses, and local organizations to embrace the Master Plan.