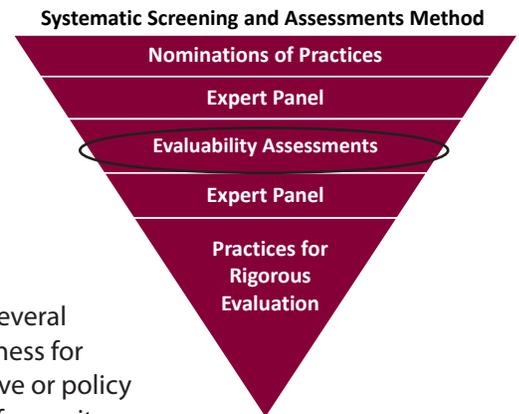


Increasing Physical Activity Through Joint-Use Agreements Spotlight: Arkansas

Methods

Evaluability Assessments (EAs) are used as a method to better understand how effective state and community innovative policies and initiatives are being implemented. As components of the Systematic Screening and Assessment Method (SSA), EAs are considered a “pre-evaluation” activity to determine which initiatives may work the best and can help with future evaluation, and which programs and evaluations need strengthening, often saving costs and time.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity used EAs to identify the potential promise of several nutrition, physical activity, and obesity prevention initiatives and their readiness for rigorous evaluation. EAs consist of a site visit to better understand an initiative or policy by assessing implementation, data availability, intended outcomes, and staff capacity. After completing the site visit, feedback is provided to the initiative, which includes future evaluation recommendations.



Kinds of Evaluability Assessments Used

In 2012, CDC used the SSA method to assess the potential promise of five state- and local-level joint-use agreement initiatives. Joint-use agreements (JUA) increase opportunities for physical activity by allowing groups—usually a school and a city or private organization—to share indoor and outdoor spaces for physical activity like gymnasiums, athletic fields, and playgrounds.

Joint-Use Spotlight: Arkansas Statewide Joint-Use Agreement (JUA) Grant Program

One of the five initiatives selected for the 2012 CDC Evaluability Assessments project was a statewide Joint-Use Agreement grant program through the State Education Agency, Arkansas Department of Education in Arkansas.

In early 2009, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), and the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) designed a joint-use grant program. After researching best practices and reviewing model programs from California and Mississippi, the statewide Arkansas Joint-Use Agreement Grant program was created. The program provides funds to primary and secondary schools in Arkansas. Its goal is to increase opportunities for physical activity to improve community health and education outcomes. The Arkansas Department of Education awards between \$10,000 to \$30,000 per grant released, to approximately 20 to 30 schools and communities per year through a competitive application process. The application process gives preference to JUAs in neighborhoods with a high concentration of obesity and those that do not have adequate or well-maintained parks or recreational spaces.

Joint-Use Agreement Initiatives Selected (2012)

- Arkansas Statewide Joint-Use Agreement Grant Program
- Fairfax County, Virginia Joint-Use Initiative
- Los Angeles, California, Joint-Use Moving People to Play
- Kingsbury, New York, Joint-Use Agreement for Outdoor Swimming Pool
- Earlimart, California, Earlimart Neighborhood Joint- Powers Agreement

The JUA program is implemented by grantees in two phases. In the first phase, grantees participate in technical assistance (TA) and training opportunities provided by the State-level staff and partners, where a draft joint-use school board policy is developed. In the implementation phase, grantees draft a formal joint-use agreement and a joint-use action plan that details objectives and initiatives of the agreement.

Goals of the Arkansas Statewide JUA Grant Program

The Arkansas JUA Grant Program has the following main goals:

- Enhance parent and community involvement and improved academic performance in the K–12 setting.
- Contribute to the development of healthier and better-prepared youth in institutions of higher education and the workforce.
- Contribute to the reduction of health care costs related to obesity (e.g., hypertension and diabetes).
- Contribute to a reduction in mortality and morbidity due to chronic disease by creating safe and accessible community spaces for physical activity.

Program Accomplishments*

- Since its launch in 2009, the Arkansas Statewide JUA Grant Program has provided funding and support to community organizations and school districts in Arkansas. The program has funded 152 JUAs in 60 school districts.
- To date, the initiative reached 37 of the 75 counties in Arkansas, or approximately 49% of the counties in the state.

Considerations for Similar Initiatives

When planning or implementing a similar joint-use agreement program, consider the following lessons from Arkansas's program:

- **Informal agreements and partnerships.** Leverage existing JUAs to minimize potential costs and use resources efficiently when developing a new JUA program. The Cabot School District has existing informal JUAs with the potential to be formalized agreements.
- **Data.** Consider a data collection requirement for all grantees. The data may reveal the effectiveness of the JUA initiative and justify its continuation. Arkansas did not require its grantees to collect Body Mass Index data; therefore, a direct link could not be made between the program and health outcomes.
- **Participants.** Consider who needs access (e.g., underserved and lower-income populations) to facilities and implement targeted outreach to those populations to increase their involvement and awareness of JUA initiatives. Given Arkansas' JUA focus on increasing opportunities for physical activity in communities with low access to parks or recreational facilities, it was recommended that the cities of Cabot and Conway, Arkansas, conduct additional outreach to specific community members.
- **Staff resources at State level.** Solicit volunteers (e.g., graduate students, interns, and fellows) to assist with data collection, site visits, and state- and local-level evaluations to strengthen program capacity. Arkansas had a state-level grant manager, but lacked staff resources to fully implement data and evaluation related activities.

Evaluation Considerations for Similar Initiatives

A rigorous evaluation of similar initiatives should be appropriately conceptualized and implemented. Evaluation activities for a similar program can consider the following evaluation questions:

- What is the neighborhood context—access to and availability of places to be physically active in the community?
- What types of equipment and facilities are made available to the community? Do these meet the needs of the community?
- How has the existence of JUAs increased access to physical activity for community members and increased physical activity levels of community members?
- Are there environmental factors that may inhibit the community's engagement in joint-use related activities?
- How has the program affected facility use?
- How has the program reached underserved and lower-income populations to increase access to places for physical activity.
- How does the JUA affect community cohesion, safety, and other social outcomes?
- What activities contribute to sustainable funding for the JUA program?
- What activities (e.g., cost reducing activities) contribute to increased accessibility to facilities with JUAs?

Resources

[Arkansas Statewide Joint Use Agreement Grant Program](#)

[Finding Space to Play - Legal and Policy Issues Impacting Community Recreational Use of School Property](#)

Arkansas Statewide Joint-Use Agreement (JUA) Grant Program Contact Information

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