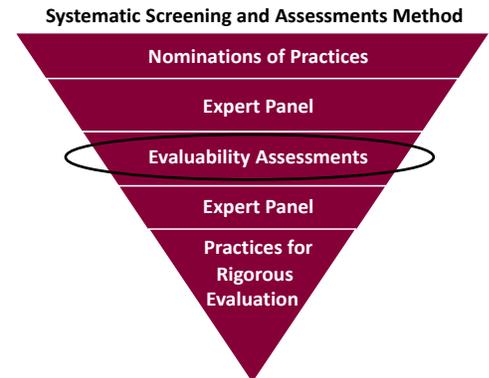


Active Transportation Spotlight: Building Healthy Communities in Washtenaw County, Michigan

Evaluability Assessment Overview

Evaluability Assessments (EAs) are a method to better understand innovative policies and initiatives being implemented in states and communities. A component of the Systematic Screening and Assessment Method (SSA), EAs provide preliminary evidence about which initiatives have the greatest potential for effectiveness and can inform subsequent evaluation activities. EAs are considered a “pre-evaluation” activity to determine whether a more rigorous evaluation is feasible or merited for a particular initiative, often saving costs and time. EAs also benefit the initiative by strengthening implementation and local evaluation.

The Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (DNPAO) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 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 assess implementation, data availability, intended outcomes, and staff capacity to better understand an initiative or policy. Upon completion of the site visit, feedback is provided to the initiative, which includes recommendations for future evaluation.



What kinds of Evaluability Assessments were conducted?

In 2011, DNPAO used the SSA method to learn of the potential promise of five state- and local level active transportation initiatives. Active transportation initiatives encourage active transport like walking and bicycling through the promotion of a supportive infrastructure for leisure or commute activities in multiple settings.

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One of the five initiatives selected for the DNPAO Evaluability Assessments (2011) project was the Building Healthy Communities program in Washtenaw County, Michigan. The Washtenaw County Public Health Department (WCPHD) has supported a group of active transportation activities in Ann Arbor, Saline, Ypsilanti, and rural areas across the county since 2005. These initiatives include conducting community assessments; developing strong, productive partnerships; improving the infrastructure to promote physical activity; supporting the development and implementation of non-motorized transportation plans and policies; and implementing community education campaigns.

Active Transportation Initiatives Selected (2011)

- Boston, Massachusetts Bike to Market Project
- Missouri Livable Streets Project
- Nashville, Tennessee Regional Transportation Plan
- Sunday Streets in San Francisco, California
- **Washtenaw County, Michigan, Building Healthy Communities Initiative**

As a result of partnerships formed with local coalitions, advocacy groups, government entities, and nonprofit organizations, WCPHD has supported the successful development and implementation of non-motorized transportation plans, Complete Streets ordinances, Safe Routes to School programs, and pedestrian ordinances around the county. Several built environment changes have also occurred to support walking and bicycling, including the construction and enhancement of several trails, the installation of bicycle parking and lanes, and improvements to signage. Community education campaigns have supported these policy and environmental changes.

Goals of Building Healthy Communities in Washtenaw County, Michigan

The five major components of the Building Healthy Communities initiative in Washtenaw County include partnership; planning; policy development, adoption, and implementation; environmental improvement; and community education. Using these guiding principles, the WCPHD aims to foster policy and environmental change to increase physical activity by building the capacity of the community and local partners.

Program Accomplishments

Since the WCPHD began supporting active transportation initiatives in 2005, the towns of Saline and Ypsilanti have accomplished the following:

Saline Accomplishments

- Created and disseminated 3,000 walking maps
- Installed bicycle parking downtown
- Built and enhanced the Depot trail
- Drafted and adopted a non-motorized transportation plan
- Passed a Complete Streets ordinance
- Installed the city's first bike lanes

Ypsilanti Accomplishments

- Installed bicycle parking at key community destinations
- Drafted and adopted a non-motorized transportation plan
- Constructed a community trail
- Passed Complete Streets ordinance and funded small Complete Streets project
- Planned and implemented Safe Routes to School for Program

Accomplishments in Additional Communities

- Enhanced walking and bicycling in rural communities, including Chelsea, Manchester, and Dexter, through the installation of benches, bike racks, and maps.
- Conducted community education and targeted enforcement of new ordinances strengthening protection of pedestrians in crosswalks in Ann Arbor.
- Passed a Complete Streets ordinance and funded pedestrian refuge islands along a new urban pathway in Pittsfield Township.

Considerations for Similar Initiatives

The Washtenaw County stakeholders involved in the EA conducted with the Building Healthy Communities initiative developed the following considerations. When planning or implementing a similar active transportation initiative, consider the following:

- **Partnerships.** Engage a wide array of partners in each targeted community, including local coalitions, advocacy groups, government organizations, and nonprofits.
- **Community Buy-In.** Empower local communities by allowing them to take ownership of community assessments, community action plans, and the prioritization of strategies. Build on community engagement by focusing on a combination of short-term improvements to the physical infrastructure (quick wins) and long-term planning and policy changes.

Evaluation Considerations for Similar Initiatives

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

- What community resources are available for physical activity? How are existing community resources being used for physical activity? Conduct environmental assessments and observational assessments of physical activity occurring within the context of these environments.
- What policies have been introduced or enacted as a result of your initiative? To assess policy changes, track local and state plans, policies, and ordinances.
- How has the initiative impacted perceptions of transit among residents? Consider collecting information from residents regarding awareness of alternative modes of transportation; perceptions of access to and the availability of sidewalks, paths, trails, and bicycle lanes in their community; and perceptions of the safety of walking and bicycling in their community.
- Have residents changed their mode of transportation? Consider assessing usage of alternative modes of transportation among residents.

Resources

- For more on the Building Healthy Communities in Washtenaw County, Michigan: <http://www.mihealthtools.org/mihc/>
- For more on Evaluability Assessments: Leviton, L.C., Khan, L.K., & Dawkins, N. (Eds). (2010). The Systematic Screening and Assessment Method: Finding Innovations Worth Evaluating. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 125.

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