AMERICA WALKS
Making America a Great Place to Walk

Walking as a Practice Case Study
American Volkssport Association

The German concept of Volkssport, or “Sports for all People,” emphasizes activity for the sake of fun, fitness, and friendship rather than competition. The Volkssporting movement began in Germany in 1968 and now has an active presence in 28 countries worldwide. The American Volkssport Association (AVA), has played an important role in helping to promote walking as a practice by coordinating a host of “Volksmarching” (walking) events around the United States every year. The AVA also hosts noncompetitive events in biking, swimming, and cross-country skiing.

AVA has more than 239 sports clubs in the United States and they organize almost 3,000 events per year with almost 350,000 annual participants. For walking events to be sanctioned by the AVA, they must have 5 and 10 kilometer offerings in route distance, while some have 20 or 40 kilometer (almost 25 miles) options. Participants are not required to complete the distance and many walkers cut the routes short to travel a distance that is well suited for them.

There are two kinds of AVA walking events. Traditional walks are one-time publicized events, often held on weekends, for which people from all over the country can come together to walk. These events may take place at national parks or historic sites and are fully staffed by AVA walking club members. Routes are marked and trail maps are provided.

Year Round/Seasonal Walks offer trails that are available for walking just about any time. They are self-managed walks by groups or individuals along AVA-sanctioned trails or routes in areas where chapters are active. While there are no guides, route maps created by volunteer Trail Masters and instructions are available at the designated "start boxes," which are located in publically accessible places such as hotels, grocery stores, service stations, and restaurants. The designated Year Round walking trails are open daily from dawn to dusk. Seasonal walks are locally organized walking events that usually draw individuals from the areas in which they are held. Winter weather plays a significant role in event scheduling.
All AVA walks are categorized by difficulty (1-5) and type of walking terrain (A-E) to ensure participants know how strenuous and challenging each route will be. AVA's Executive Director, Henry Rosales notes, “Our Trail Masters are certified individuals who are trained to map out a course and support launching new walks. It is up to the individual participants to determine if the walk is something they are capable of doing.” AVA volunteer Trail Masters must participate in a self-paced training and assessment program and complete a test. In addition to supporting current routes, Trail Masters develop new routes, which must be approved by the regional director before becoming AVA-sanctioned.

AVA members and participants can win prizes and accomplish personal goals through a variety of incentive programs, such as collecting stamps for each route walked and recording their progress in the official club stamp book.

**Action Item:** Go to AVA.org for complete information on local walking clubs, walk routes and how to form an AVA walking club.