In September, 2014, the America Walks Board of Directors gathered in Pittsburgh for its annual retreat.

The agenda included a review of the results of a recent survey of 700 organizations working at the local and state level to increase walking and expand walkability, followed by a brainstorming session on how best to respond. Two principal needs were articulated in the survey:

- A comprehensive training curriculum in the skills, knowledge, and best practices for walkable community advocates;
- A national networking opportunity for advocates to connect on a regular basis and support each other's individual efforts.

And so the Walking College was conceived as an online "mentored fellowship" program which would provide coaching to a limited number of local change agents in areas such as leadership development, communication skills, coalition building, the built environment, public policy advocacy, and campaign planning. The design of the program also offered Walking College Fellows a unique opportunity to engage regularly with experts already immersed in the national walking movement, and with each other.

In its first two years, the Walking College has awarded diplomas to forty-seven walkable community advocates working in 29 different states and representing a range of professional and advocacy backgrounds from public health, land-use planning, and traffic engineering, to education, research, and social justice. Individual successes include new coalitions, walking programs, promotional events, and communication campaigns, as well as complete streets policies passed, funding allocated to building walkways, and re-designed intersections that prioritize safety.

This series of case studies tells the stories of four Walking College Fellows - two public health professionals, a neighborhood activist and social equity consultant, and a small-town Mayor, working in different types of communities across the U.S. While each community and each story is unique - they are connected by the training, the ongoing communications network, and the capacity-building goals that define the Walking College.

At America Walks, we have seen the passion, commitment and innovation that comes from individual community advocates working to create lasting change over the course of our 20-year history. The Walking College is building the grass-roots capacity of the national walking movement, 25 Fellows at a time.