Building the Local Capacity of the National Walking Movement: 
Outcomes from the First Two Years of the Walking College

Background

In 2015, America Walks launched the Walking College - an online, educational program for walkable community advocates. The goal is to build the capacity of local change agents to increase walking and improve walkability, by providing training in best practices and a national network of peers and experts.

Every year, Walking College Fellowships are awarded to about 25 advocates who are working alone, in local organizations, or in their professional capacity to advance walkability. This is an overview of the program's early successes in terms of tangible outcomes in communities across the country.

During the 6-month course, Fellows commit 5-10 hours per week to:
- Study online reading and review materials
- Participate in video-conference discussion forums
- Meet with their Personal Mentors for coaching sessions
- Complete community-based assignments
- Attend a relevant national conference plus a Walking College Work Day
- Develop Walking Action Plans (WAP): community goals and an implementation strategy

Methodology

In the fall of 2017, the 47 Fellows who completed the Walking College in 2015 and 2016 were asked to complete a WAP goals progress survey. A total of 38 Fellows (81%) participated in the survey - their WAPs are being implemented in 24 different states plus Washington, DC.
Within the first 1 or 2 years, about 1/3 were halfway to their WAP goals, with another 1/3 less than halfway, and the remaining 1/3 more than halfway.

Summary of Outcomes

Three of the 38 Fellows reported 100% completion of their primary WAP goals within 1 or 2 years:

- Establish a Walk Bike Advisory Committee for the Town of St. Johnsbury, VT
- Engage 8 rural hospital and 5 public health departments to participate in a communications campaign promoting walking and walkability in rural NE Iowa
- Get a Traffic Calming Ordinance passed by the (St. Louis, MO) Board of Alderman

The following examples illustrate the range of different types of WAP goals being pursued by Fellows:

- Obtain Walk-Friendly Community status for Columbus, OH (90% complete)
- Launch a “Safe Routes to Transit” program in Phoenix, AZ (72%)
- Design and implement the Explore Malone (NY) Walk/Bike Challenge (60%)
- Conduct walk audits at 10 schools in Winter Park, FL, and develop infrastructure plans to overcome identified barriers (50%)
- Adopt a Vision Zero policy for the City of Buffalo (10%)

In the survey, the Fellows were also asked to indicate which of the 46 specific outcomes had occurred in their communities and to what extent their Walking College participation played a role. Here are the pooled results:
Conclusions

Within 1-2 years of these 38 Fellows creating their Walking Action Plans:

- 592 outcomes occurred in their communities
- Fellows’ participation in the Walking College contributed to 441 (83%) of these outcomes
- The Walking College contributed “entirely” or “mostly” to 160 (30%) of these outcomes

Most of the 441 outcomes related to the Walking College occurred in categories in which an individual or organization can largely control the outcome:

- Partnership Development: 93 outcomes (21%)
- Walking Events and Programs: 83 outcomes (19%)
- Education and Communications: 93 outcomes (21%)
Fewer outcomes occurred where community-wide processes and/or government actions are required:

- Research and Planning: 44 outcomes (10%)
- Public Policy: 45 outcomes (10%)
- Infrastructure: 65 outcomes (15%)
- Funding: 28 outcomes (6%)

The most common individual outcomes related to the Walking College were:

- Community event(s) held (27 Fellows, 71%)
- New partnership/coalition formed (25 Fellows, 66%)
- Walkability audit(s) conducted (24 Fellows, 63%)
- Public speaking opportunity delivered (24 Fellows, 63%)

Lastly, at least 20 new policies were adopted as a result of the Walking College:

- Vision Zero policies in 2 communities (Austin, TX and Blair County, PA)
- Complete Streets policies in 6 communities
- Other policies in 12 communities

**Fellows’ Stories**

**Faye Paige Edwards, GirlTrek Neighborhood Captain, St. Louis, MO**

The goal for 2015 Walking College Fellow Faye Paige Edwards was to change the law in her home town of St. Louis, MO. Specifically, Faye wanted to enable neighborhoods to design and implement traffic calming projects so residents could walk safely for exercise and transportation. Working with Trailnet, she was 100% successful in advocating to members of the City’s Board of Alderman to reverse an existing rule prohibiting traffic calming. Faye also conducted surveys of neighborhood residents which led to an innovative “Tactical Urbanism Lending Library” program.

**Phil Hanson, Public Health Professional, City of Columbus, OH**

2016 Fellow Phil Hanson decided that his best strategy, as a municipal public health official in Columbus, OH would be to lead the city’s effort to obtain Walk-Friendly Community status. Working with colleagues, partners in other agencies, and community groups, he compiled a comprehensive report on events, programs, policies, and projects supporting walking, and Columbus was awarded the “Silver” designation. Phil only reported 90% completion of his WAP because he is now working to address gaps and achieve “Gold.”

America Walks is a national nonprofit empowering communities to create safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions for all.