On September 17th, 2019, America Walks hosted the webinar, “Active and Engaged: Community Outreach Strategies for Health”, where we explored the new HHS Physical Activity Guidelines and how communities are promoting physical activity. It featured Erica Oliver, Community Health Partner for the city of St. Louis, funded by the Missouri Foundation for Health, Ken Rose, Senior Advisor in CDC’s DNPAO’s Physical Activity and Health Branch, Heather Schady is the Senior Transportation Planner at Active Transportation Alliance (Active Trans), Janna Simon, MPH, Program Director, Center for Policy & Partnership Initiatives at the Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI), and Leanne White, Healthy Schools Healthy Communities Project Director for the Missouri Foundation for Health.

America Walks received many questions and comments from attendees. Panelists Heather Schady and Janna Simon took time to offer their expert answers, to continue the conversation and provide further insight on best practices used for creating safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions in their work, so you can too.

Do you have suggestions on existing sidewalk edging and curb weed growth? Some of our sidewalks are narrower due to lack of maintenance and unchecked growth.

Heather: We are considering working with the Walkability Squad to do a weeding volunteer project. I’ve seen other communities engage Boy Scouts, key clubs, and other volunteer organizations to do this work, especially for seniors. You could also educate residents on the importance of wedding sidewalks, though that might not be well-received, depending on the community.

Where can we find funding opportunities?

Heather: It depends on your state and what you want to fund. If you want to construct sidewalks on public right-of-way, look at your state’s Transportation Alternatives program, which might include different types of funding like Transportation Enhancements, CMAQ, and Safe Routes to School. Your county may also have funding available, those sources will be location specific. You can also look for support from foundations, local businesses, public health entities, hospitals, etc.

How do you measure success in terms of using walking routes and impact on health?

Janna: For the State Physical Activity and Nutrition Program, we’re tracking how many potential and actual linear miles are impacted by improved plans and policies that support biking, walking, multi-use paths and public transportation. We’re also looking at potential population reach of those improved policies and plans. We also know from a recent report that adults' perceptions of the presence and prioritization of four community supports for walking, including access to
walkable locations, safe streets, walking groups, and promotional campaigns, impacts their physical activity levels. As more supports are perceived, physical activity levels increase. (reference: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0890117119856550?journalCode=ahpa)