



2023

Arkansas State Walking College Final Report



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Introduction

Background

In July 2021, the Arkansas Department of Health engaged America Walks to deliver its national Walking College program within the State of Arkansas. Launched in 2015, the Walking College is an online educational program for walkable community advocates, whose goal is to build the capacity of local change agents to increase walking and improve walkability in their communities.

The course curriculum is organized into six instructional modules, each of which has a specific learning objective. After completing the modules, Walking College Fellows will be able to:

1. Discuss the history of transportation planning in the U.S. and the role of systemic discrimination in shaping the built and social environments
2. Recruit and inspire other advocates to build and grow a local walking movement through creation of a compelling public narrative and inclusive engagement
3. Use strategic communications to organize people and campaigns to create safe, healthy, equitable, and walkable neighborhoods
4. Identify design changes in the built environment which will foster active, accessible, equitable mobility and safe use of the public space for all
5. Navigate the structure of local government and engage elected officials and professionals in conversations about public policy improvements
6. Connect social justice, public health, and climate action in a strategic plan focused on creating safe mobility for every community member

During the 6-month course, Fellows commit about 5 hours per week to:

- Study online reading and review materials
- Participate in video-conferenced discussion forums
- Meet with their Personal Mentors for coaching sessions
- Complete community-based assignments

Towards the end of the course, each Fellow develops a Walking Action Plan for their community, which establishes specific goals and an implementation strategy.

Program Basics

America Walks staff worked with the Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention to establish the program parameters.

The 2023 Arkansas State Walking College program would consist of 14 Fellows and two experienced Mentors from the state. Fellowships were selected through an online application process in February 2023. The six learning modules (three weeks per module) would be delivered over an eighteen-week period starting February 27, 2023. The deadline for Fellows to submit their Walking Action Plans would be in July and a graduation ceremony would be held in August.

Online Course Platform

Google Classroom was used as the course platform. All Fellows, Mentors, Arkansas Department of Health staff, and other partners were given access to the online classroom.

The curriculum for each module – consisting of links to required and optional study materials, prompts for group discussion forums, and assignments – was uploaded to Google Classroom, the week prior to the start of that module. Fellows were asked to comment on their reaction to the reading materials, ideas for the Walking Action Plans, and general Walking College experience, in the Google Classroom “Stream.”



Program Structure

Recruitment of Mentors

Successful Walking College Mentors have advocacy and organizing experience; technical knowledge in community design, transportation planning, and/or public health; and a love of teaching.

The typical selection process is candidates who are interested in a part-time paid position are interviewed and invited to complete a short online application form. Past Walking College Fellows, leaders of local and state advocacy groups, and government professionals have all proven to be valuable mentors. Because of the success of the 2022 program, America Walks and Arkansas Department of Health decided to re-engage the same Mentors for the 2023 program.

The following Mentors were appointed:

- Rachel Cotner – Advocate from Little Rock and 2021 national Walking College Fellow
- John Landosky – Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator with the City of Little Rock

Each Mentor was assigned a group of six Fellows. They facilitated discussions with this group and provided one-on-one coaching sessions with them, as they prepared their Walking Action Plans.



Rachel Cotner



John Landosky

Awarding of Fellowships

The twelve Fellowships were awarded through two simultaneous processes. Arkansas Department of Health staff reached out to their existing partners. At the same time, an open online application form was created and advertised throughout the state and by America Walks.

Fellowships were awarded to:

- Michael Mings, Mobility Coordinator, Municipality of the City of Fort Smith
- Shanetta Agnew, Arthritis Program Manager, Arkansas Department of Health
- Jacqueline Wolven, Executive Director, Main Street Eureka Springs
- Tiffany Copeland, Grant Writer, City of Pine Bluff
- Blanca Hernandez, University of Arkansas- Cooperative Extension
- Shumeka Young, Audit Coordinator, Arkansas Department of Health and Community Advocate
- Jennifer Taber, Owner of handicap-accessible bus providing tour guides for individuals with disabilities
- Tom Farmer, Mayor of Benton, Arkansas
- Hallie Wallace, Adapted Movement Instructor at Ouachita Baptist University
- Jessica Angel, Community Engagement Coordinator, Batesville School District
- Chloe Chapman, Community advocate and volunteer focused on placemaking
- Jessica Vincent, Community & Public Health Outreach Specialist, University of Arkansas System Cooperative Extension Service
- Mishanna Lanes, Program Associate in Family Consumer Science with the Health team at U of A Systems Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Services.
- Darby Treat, Program Associate through the U of A Cooperative Extension Services.

All Fellows participated in an onboarding process and online Orientation Webinar.

Program Implementation

Walking College Curriculum

The six modules which make up the Walking College curriculum were presented every three weeks, according to the following schedule.

Module 1: How We Got Here (February 27 - March 17)

- Week 1: A History of Transportation
- Week 2: A History of Systemic Injustice
- Week 3: Learning from History

Module 2: Developing Leadership (March 20 - April 7)

- Week 1: Leadership and Movement-Building
- Week 2: The Power of Public Narrative
- Week 3: Cultural Competence and Health Equity

Module 3: Organizing for Change (April 10 - April 28)

- Week 1: Community Organizing
- Week 2: Planning Advocacy Campaigns
- Week 3: Walking Events and Programs

Module 4: Designing for People (May 1 - 19)

- Week 1: Walkable Streets and Communities
- Week 2: How to Transform 'Car-Oriented Roads'
- Week 3: Mobility Justice

Module 5: Shifting Public Policy (May 22 - June 9)

- Week 1: Institutionalizing Change
- Week 2: Complete Streets and Vision Zero Policies
- Week 3: Other Policy Strategies

Module 6: Planning a Strategy (June 12 - 30)

- Week 1: Background and Partnerships
- Week 2: Vision, Goals, and Strategies
- Week 3: Challenges and Evaluation

In-Person Walking College Workshop (June 26th)

Walking Action Plans due (July 24th)

Self-Study and Virtual Classroom Activities

Each week, Fellows were given 3–5 online study materials, consisting of articles, TED Talks, toolkits, and fact sheets to review.

Each module also included a longer list of optional materials, which Fellows did not need to study in depth – instead, they were encouraged to make sure they were generally familiar with the topics covered in this “resource library” so they could return later when they were searching for something specific.

In addition to these self-study activities, Fellows participated in a scheduled, 1-hour group discussion or coaching session once a week, as follows.

- During the first week of each module, a Mentor-led group discussion involving one Mentor and 3–6 Fellows was held, in which the study materials for that module were reviewed and the Mentor facilitated conversations relating that content to the Fellows’ own communities.
- The following week, the same group of Fellows met again, but without the Mentor present, so that the Fellows could build peer support relationships, assist each other with planning, and problem-solving efforts.

Finally, during the third week of each module, Fellows participated in one-on-one coaching sessions with their Mentors, which focused on their Walking Action Plans.



At the end of each one-on-one coaching session, Mentors gave their Fellows a writing assignment (typically, 3-5 paragraphs) to be completed and submitted before the next session, 3 weeks later. The topics for these writing assignments related to the content of the current module, and were chosen so that they could ultimately be compiled into a draft of the Fellow's Walking Action Plan:

- Module 1: Describe your community and general walking conditions
- Module 2: Create your public narrative (“Story of Self”, “Story of Us”, “Story of Now”)
- Module 3: Develop a vision statement and a list of 3-5 specific goals for your community
- Module 4: Draft a strategic plan and timeline for steps to accomplishing each goal
- Module 5: Identify potential challenges and develop your project evaluation plan
- Module 6: Compile previous writing assignments and finalize Walking Action Plan

Fellows were also asked to complete one community assignment during each module and write about their experience in the Google Classroom “Stream”:

- Module 1: Take a walk or a roll in your community
- Module 2: Make a list of potential partners (agencies, organizations, individuals)
- Module 3: Reach out to a new partner to introduce yourself and engage them
- Module 4: Plan, organize, and lead a community Walk Audit
- Module 5: Perform a Local Policy Scan of your community
- Module 6: Create an elevator speech about your project

Two Fellows (Hallie Wallace and Tom Farmer) withdrew from the program during the early modules. Blanca Hernandez withdrew during Module 6. Jacqueline Wolven finished the six modules, but did not submit a Walking Action Plan to complete the program.

The next section showcases two Fellows’ “Stories of Self,” part of the Module 2 writing assignment.

Stories of Self

Batesville has given so much to me. I came from a 1A school and Batesville was a 5A school. The Batesville School District allowed me to be in extracurricular activities that taught me leadership skills and service to my community.

I was able to help and feed people in need. Batesville School District helped me understand the need to connect to the community. Teachers, coaches, staff who were on the championship cross country team made this happen. Perseverance is key when running and when you are running it's not only a physical sport but it is a mental sport. My coaches and teammates influenced me to give back to my community in many ways.

I got more out of all of that than I realized at the time. Those teachers are gone now and I feel like it is my duty to step up to build up the next generation of students and athletes just as those that did before me. My end goal is helping the Batesville community, being a role model, setting an example for my child and paying it forward.



Jessica Angel

**Community
Engagement
Coordinator,
Batesville School
District**

Stories of Self

I am passionate about advocating for change in the area of safe physical activity, because I recall being physically active in my childhood years and my parents taking us to the parks on Sundays to play.

We played outside the majority of the spring and summer months. We enjoyed riding our bikes, jump roping, roller skating in the street and playing on a tire swing my dad created for us. I wasn't involved in recreational sports growing up, but I did take tap, jazz, and ballet.

My mother always made sure we had a nutritional meal and we knew the importance of being healthy; not to mention my father was in the military.

As an adult I now work as the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) Arthritis Program Manager in the Chronic Disease Prevention and Control Branch. I have experience in promoting and advocating for the safety and health for Arkansans.



Shanetta Agnew

**Arthritis Program
Manager,
Arkansas
Department of
Health**

In-Person Workshop

On Monday, June 26th (the final week of Module 6), the Arkansas State Walking College Workshop was held at the CALS Main Library in Little Rock. Ten Fellows, both Mentors, and members of staff with Arkansas Dept. of Health, Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention, and other partners participated in the workshop, which was facilitated by America Walks' Nicole Smith and program Mentors. During the planning stages, five learning objectives had been established for the workshop.

After participating in the workshop, Arkansas State Walking College Fellows will be able to:

1. Build diverse coalitions which champion walkability because of multiple different benefits
2. Describe how walking for transportation (as well as recreation) could become routine in their communities
3. Engage elected officials and advocate effectively for walkable community policies, projects, and public funding priorities
4. Finalize their Walking Action Plans with near-term (1-year) strategies that build long-term project sustainability
5. Promote and advance the creation of a statewide walkable community coalition



AGENDA

10:30 am: Coffee/Networking

11:00 am: Welcome

11:05 am: The Walking College: Preventing & Treating Arthritis (Shanetta Agnew)

11:30 am: My Walking Action Plan: From Vision & Goals to a Timeline of Strategies

12:15 pm: Lunch

12:30 pm: Story-Walk Projects (Jessica Angel)

12:45 pm: Walkability Audits (opening presentation followed by group walks)

2:00 pm: Making the Case to Public Officials: Effective Advocacy

2:45 pm: Life after the Walking College: Implementation Lessons Learned

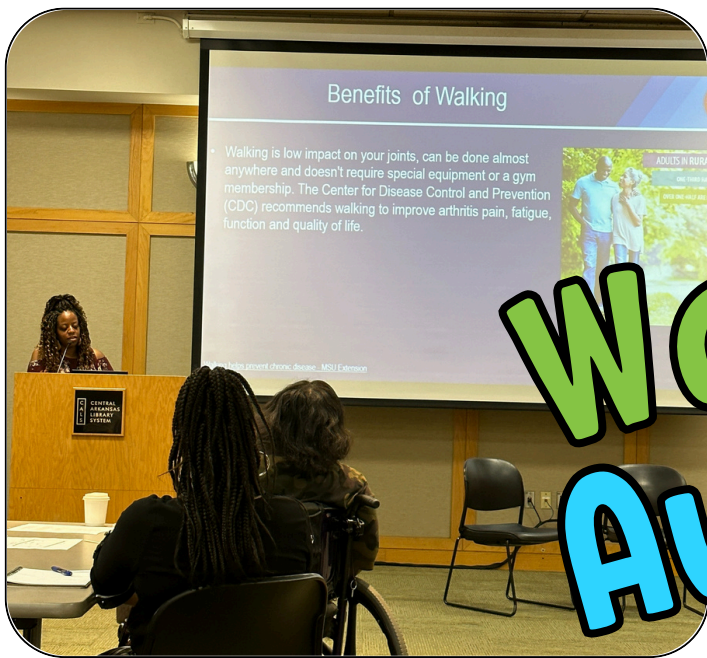
3:30 pm: Break

3:45 pm: Walking Action Plan Elevator Speeches

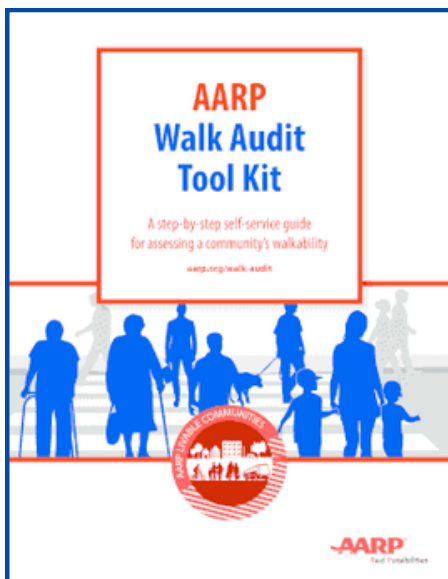
4:15 pm: Building a Statewide Coalition

4:45 pm: Final session

5:00 pm: Close



Walk Audit



Walking Action Plans

A Walking College Fellow's Walking Action Plan should look ahead 3-5 years to accomplish measurable change in their community.

Key components include background information, list of project partners, vision statement and goals, strategies with timeline for each goal, challenges and how to overcome them, and an evaluation plan. And every Walking Action Plan is a "living document" which should be reviewed and updated regularly (every 6-12 months).

Here are the principal goals and areas of focus for the 2023 Arkansas State Walking College Fellows' Walking Action Plans:

- Michael Mings - The Rogers Avenue Complete Street Project seeks to accomplish several goals from the Future Fort Smith Comprehensive Plan.
- Shanetta Agnew - Create a safe and healthy environment for the Arkansas Department of Health employees and colleagues, War Memorial Stadium visitors, UAMS employees, and users of Little Rock's emerging light individual transportation (LIT) network.
- Tiffany Copeland - Create a walkable environment for city hall employees adjacent to the workplace.
- Shumeka Young - To increase community walkability where participants experience human connection, safety, and enhanced health through walking in Little Rock.
- Jennifer Taber - Create a shared use path and bike/walk club in Morrilton
- Jessica Angel - Create a neighborhood "Pop-Up Story Walk" and expand School Walking Programs throughout Batesville School District
- Chloe Chapman - Connect lively mixed-use, high-density neighborhoods in Little Rock with safe, walkable thoroughfares, beginning with helping to connect Hillcrest and Stiff Station.
- Jessica Vincent & Mishanna Lanes - To provide all Marvell residents with safe and accessible active transportation opportunities via reflective signage, paths and trails.
- Darby Treat - Perform a road diet on both sides of Plaza Street to increase pedestrian safety and install biking/walking lanes

Program Evaluation

Process Evaluation

To evaluate the quality of each of the Walking College modules, Fellows were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of the modules.

Six components of each module were evaluated:

- Topics Covered
- Quality of Study Materials
- Mentor-Led Group Discussion
- Fellows-Only Group Discussion
- One-on-One Coaching Session
- Overall Progress So Far

And each component was evaluated on the following scale

- “Very Unsatisfied”
- “Unsatisfied”
- “Neutral”
- “Satisfied”
- “Very Satisfied”

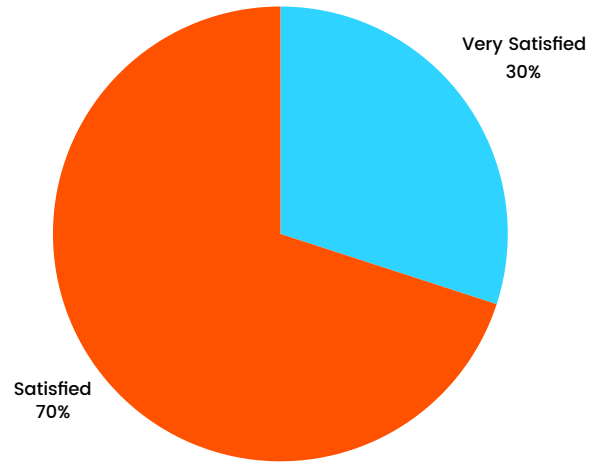
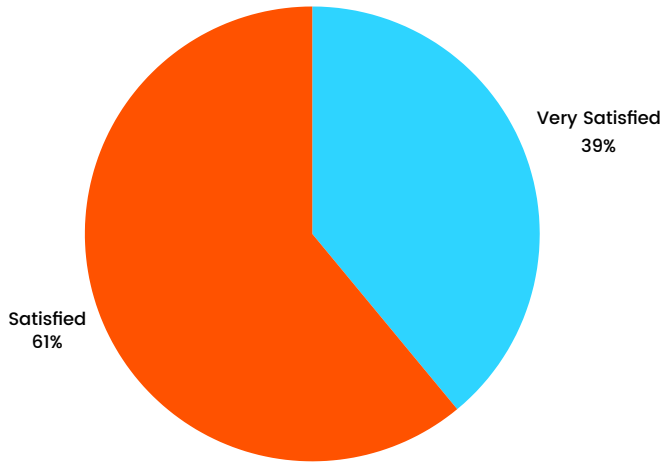
Across all modules, Fellows were “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” in 95% of their ratings of the different components.

Module Survey Response Summary:

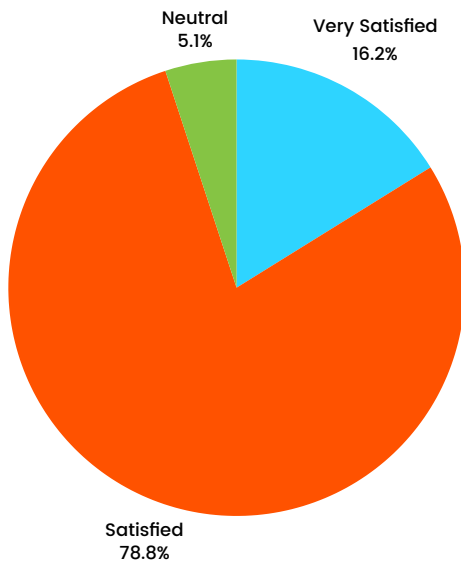
- Topics Covered: Fellows were “Very Satisfied” in 39% of their ratings, “Satisfied” in 61%, “Neutral” in 0% and “Unsatisfied” in 0%
- Quality of Study Materials: Fellows reported being “Very Satisfied” in 30% of their ratings, “Satisfied” in 70%, and “Neutral” in 0%
- Mentor-Led Group Discussion: Fellows were “Very Satisfied” in 16% of their ratings, “Satisfied” in 78%, “Neutral” in 5% and “Unsatisfied” in 0%
- Fellows-Only Group Discussion: Fellows were “Very Satisfied” in 24% of their ratings, “Satisfied” in 70%, “Neutral” in 5% and “Unsatisfied” in 0%
- One-on-One Coaching Session: Fellows were “Very Satisfied” in 19% of their ratings, “Satisfied” in 78%, and “Neutral” in 3% and “Unsatisfied” in 0%
- Overall Progress So Far: Fellows were “Very Satisfied” in 17% of their ratings, “Satisfied” in 69%, and “Neutral” in 14% and “Unsatisfied” in 0%

In 220 ratings across the entire program, “Unsatisfied” and “Very Unsatisfied” was never selected.

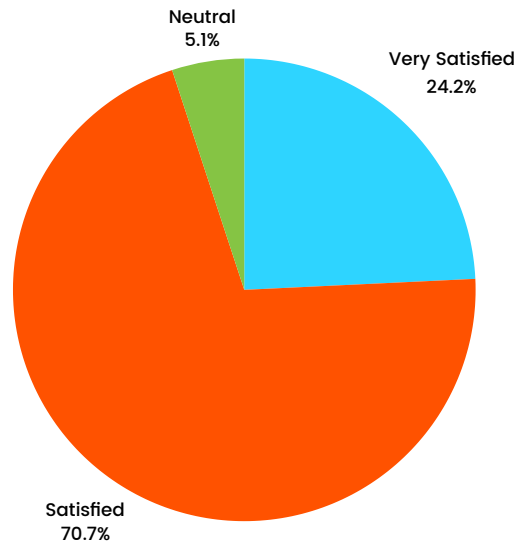
Process Evaluation



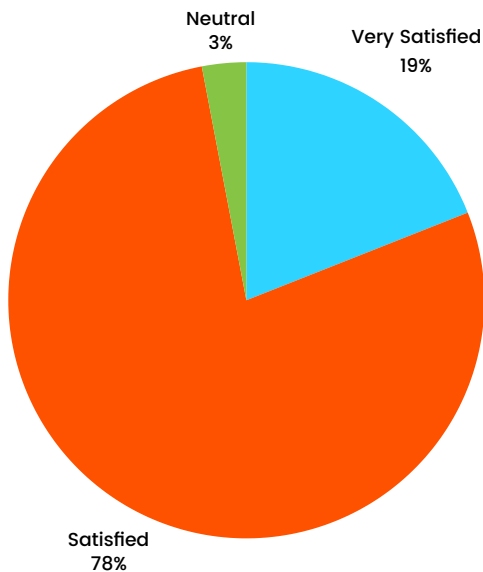
Topics Covered



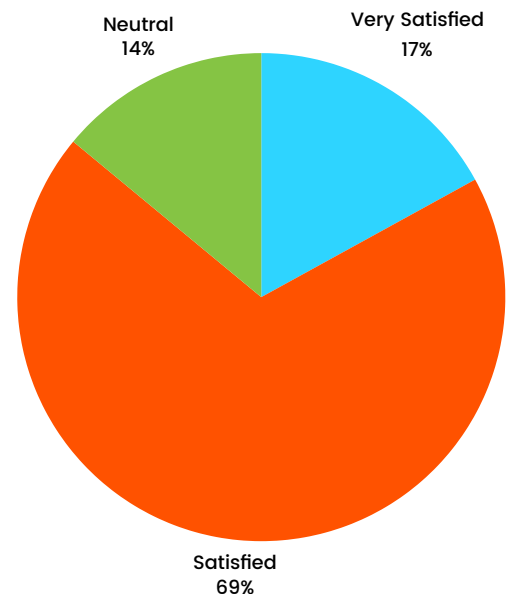
Quality of Study Materials



Mentor-led Group Discussions



Fellows-only Group Discussions



1-on-1 Coaching

Overall Progress So Far

Outcome Evaluation

The goal of the Walking College is to build the capacity of local change agents to increase walking and improve walkability in their communities.

To determine whether this outcome has been achieved and (if so) to what extent, Fellows completed a pre- and post- program online self-assessment survey. Survey questions addressed Fellows' self-assessed knowledge/skills and confidence.

Self-Assessment of Knowledge/Skills:

For each of the following knowledge/skill areas, please indicate your current stage of development on a scale of 0 to 6 ("Novice" to "Expert"), based on your own self-assessment:

- Twentieth-century history of transportation planning in the US
- Role of systemic discrimination/injustice in shaping the built environment
- Collaborative leadership, cultural competency, and coalition-building
- Organizing through strategic communications and storytelling
- Grant-writing, fund-raising, and project management
- Engineering design of streets and public spaces
- Public policy research and development
- Data analysis to support campaigns
- Strategic planning

Self-Assessment of Confidence:

For each of the following tasks and strategies, please indicate your current level of confidence on a scale of 0 to 6 ("Not Confident At All" to "Extremely Confident"), based on your own self-assessment:

- Recruit and inspire other advocates to launch and grow a local movement
- Explain the benefits of a walkable community to a variety of different audiences
- Organize effective campaigns which use storytelling and strategic communications
- Practice inclusive engagement and intersectionality with all marginalized groups
- Coordinate events and programs which encourage people to increase outdoor physical activity
- Identify design changes in built environment which improve safety and accessible mobility for all
- Navigate the structure of local government and engage elected officials in public policy discussions
- Plan and implement policy campaigns related to walkable community design
- Write a strategic Walking Action Plan for improving the community

Self-Assessment Survey Results

Fellows increased their self-assessed knowledge/skills and confidence to accomplish key tasks in all eighteen areas studied. Data based on baseline and end of program responses are from the 10 Fellows who completed the program.



The overall increase in knowledge/skills averaged across all Fellows was 86% (where 1 is defined as “Novice” and 7 as “Expert”). Here are a couple of specific examples:

- Organizing through strategic communications and storytelling: 91% increase
- Collaborative leadership, cultural competency, and coalition-building: 95% increase

The overall increase in confidence to accomplish key tasks averaged across all Fellows was 83% (where 1 is defined as “Not Confident At All” and 7 as “Extremely Confident”). Examples:

- Recruit and inspire other advocates to launch and grow a local movement: 82% increase
- Identify design changes in the built environment which improve safety and accessible mobility for all: 90%

91%

Average increase in knowledge/skills for organizing through strategic communications and storytelling

Conclusion

Overall, the 2023 Arkansas State Walking College program was considered a success. Here's a summary by the numbers.



10 Graduates

The graduates committed 16 weeks to the program and experience tremendous growth.



9 Walking Action Plans

The Walking Action Plans focused on organizing for policy change to create safe, walkable, livable communities.



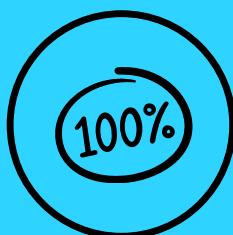
Increased Skill & Confidence

Per self-assessment, Fellows increased their knowledge/skills (86%) and confidence (83%) to accomplish key tasks.



In-Person Workshop

80% of participants found the workshop “very valuable” and 100% reported that they felt confident to lead a walk audit.



Future connections

100% stated that they would like to stay connected with other Fellows and receive ongoing technical assistance from America Walks, Arkansas Dept of Health, and ArCOP.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Class of 2023. Your hard work and determination is a testament to your desire to be the change in your communities. Congrats!



Michael Mings



Shanetta Agnew



Tiffany Copeland



Shumeka Young



Jennifer Taber



Jessica Angel



Chloe Chapman



Jessica Vincent



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