FOOD & FITNESS
Planning Guide

CONTENTS
FOOD & FITNESS PLANNING GUIDE

Introduction

Food & Fitness Assessment and Planning Guide

Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), the Food & Fitness Initiative was established to create community-based approaches to local systems and policy change, leading to sustainable change in opportunities for health equity in neighborhoods across the U.S.

Starting in March 2007, the Food & Fitness partnerships began the planning process for local policy and system changes for increasing equitable access to good food and safe places for physical activity for families.

During the two-year planning period from 2007-2008, the Food & Fitness partnerships began a collaboration with Technical Assistance teams as well as with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation staff to create planning documents to provide guidance and a strategic approach to assessment and planning for the Food & Fitness collaboratives.

The purpose of these documents were to both assess the community as well as the food and active living environments – looking at what already existed, and what opportunities were available for the Food & Fitness partnerships work.

Acknowledgments

Module 1

OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT
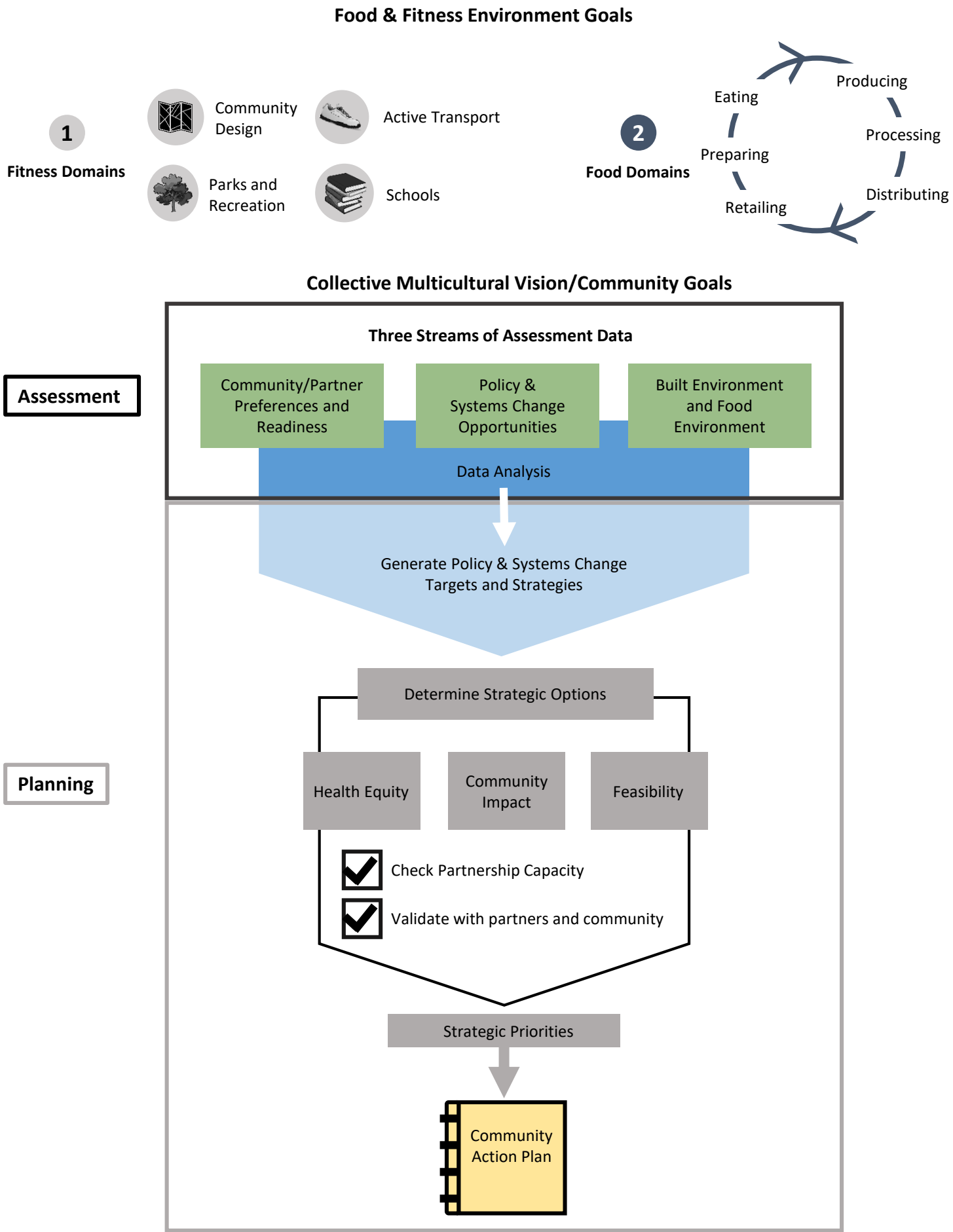AND PLANNING

1 Overview of Assessment and Planning

Purpose Statement

The *Food & Fitness Planning Guide* is intended to provide guidance and a strategic approach to assessment and planning for community change related to good food and the active living/ built environment. It is intended to help community collaboratives think about how assessment and planning can help create the Community Action Plan and provide a foundation for implementation. Some collaboratives may find that the guide validates their current approach, while others may rethink aspects of their proposed assessment plans because of elements that were previously overlooked but identified while reviewing the guide. The purpose of this overview document is to introduce a framework for assessment and planning that is consistent throughout all of the Food & Fitness planning tools shared. This guide is not intended as a prescription for assessment and planning. Community-driven efforts must balance the depth and breadth of their assessment activities with practical constraints such as limited access to existing data and financial and human resources for collecting new information. They must also pursue information that is appropriate based on community conditions and their vision.

Introduction to Assessment

In order to help build a shared understanding and support the planning process for collaboratives, the Food & Fitness technical assistance (TA) team proposed an overall assessment and planning framework to guide approaches to community change (Figure 1). Using this comprehensive approach to assessment and planning will help yield: 1) a set of strategic priorities for policy and systems change focused on active living and healthy eating opportunities for low income families and communities, 2) a Community Action Plan for advancing those strategic priorities that is guided by a community vision and grounded by pragmatic considerations; and 3) a diverse collaborative with the common vision, collective will, community ties, and shared capacity to implement the plan.

Figure 1. Food & Fitness Assessment Model

Food & Fitness Environment Goals

1

Fitness Domains

Community Design

Active Transport

Parks and Recreation

Schools

2

Food Domains

Producing

Eating

Processing

Preparing

Distributing

Retailing

Collective Multicultural Vision/Community Goals

Assessment

Three Streams of Assessment Data

Community/Partner Preferences and Readiness	Policy & Systems Change Opportunities	Built Environment and Food Environment

Data Analysis

Generate Policy & Systems Change Targets and Strategies

Planning

Determine Strategic Options

Health Equity	Community Impact	Feasibility

☑ Check Partnership Capacity

☑ Validate with partners and community

Strategic Priorities

Community Action Plan

A comprehensive assessment related to good food and the active living/built environment should consider several primary domains. A brief description of these domains for both "food" and "fitness" environments is offered below. The extent to which each domain is assessed will vary according to the community vision. For instance, a vision for "fitness" that is focused primarily on recreation for children and families would not need to assess as carefully the "active transportation" or "land use" domains except as they might affect recreational opportunities.

Fitness Environment Goals

Fitness goals are to increase access to safe and inviting activity options and spaces for physical activity.

Options for Physical Activity

- Safe and inviting options for physical activity are determined in large part by the physical spaces that are available (specified in the domains below). They are also determined by programmatic supports in these spaces such as recreation or physical education programs, walking programs, and active commuting programs. Accessibility of programs is influenced by factors such as cost, staffing, hours of operation, and cultural appropriateness.

Spaces for Physical Activity

- The accessibility of spaces for physical activity depends in large part on the number and diversity of these spaces, their location relative to where people live, work or go to school, and the quality and safety of connections and routes to destinations. The quality of spaces for physical activity depends on: the appropriateness and good repair of the facilities; aesthetic features such as good design, greenery and cleanliness; social factors such as absence of crime and other safety considerations; and perceptions of vibrancy. The spaces can be either built or natural.

Fitness Environment Domains

These goals relate to four major domains which compose the fitness environment.

School Systems represent school environments including buildings, grounds, curricula, procedures and norms, as well as the accessibility of schools and the quality of routes to and from school. *Parks and Recreation* refers mainly to the accessibility and quality of parks, playgrounds, trails and natural open space, indoor recreation centers, gyms, pools and the programs that encourage people to use them. *Active Transportation* pertains to the physical arrangements and facilities that support walking, biking, public transit and other active means of transportation. Finally, *Community Design/Land Use* refers mainly to how the layout of the community and the quality of places affects the accessibility and use of key destinations and opportunities for physical activity.

Fitness Environment Domains

These goals relate to four major domains which compose the fitness environment.

All four of these domains are equally influenced by social and environmental conditions beyond the built environment such as crime, climate, pollution, language, cultural beliefs and practices, race and poverty.

School Systems

Represent school environments including:

- Building
- Grounds
- Curricula
- Procedures and Norms

As well as the accessibility of schools and the quality of routes to and from school.

Active Transportation

Pertains to the physical arrangements and facilities that support:

- Walking
- Public transit
- Biking
- Other active means of transportation

Community Design/ Land Use

Refers mainly to how the layout of the community and the quality of places affects:

- Accessibility
- Use of key destinations
- Opportunities for physical activity

Parks and Recreation

Refers mainly to the accessibility and quality of:

- Parks
- Trails
- Playgrounds
- Natural open space
- Indoor recreation centers
- Pools
- Gyms

In addition to the programs that encourage people to use them.

Food System Goals

Food System goals are to increase access to foods that are local, affordable, healthy, and accessible.

Local

- There is no one definition of local or of locally grown food. Many people define local in terms of the number of miles the food travels between the farm and the point of sale or consumption, often with a 50-250 mile limit. State boundaries are also a commonly used marker for local. Small states and states that are close to others with distinct agricultural production capacities from their own, however, may find that an interstate region is a more appropriate boundary for local. In large states, on the other hand, a particular valley or intrastate region may be a feasible source of a substantial amount of food. Rural communities that are in close proximity to farms are more likely to obtain food grown closer to home than their urban counterparts, adding another dimension to consider. Yet these guidelines can overlook greater complexities. Ultimately, definitions of local will be unique to each place.

Affordable

- When considering affordability, it is useful to consider this within the context of 'healthy.' Affordability becomes problematic if food prices are skewed, such that less healthy choices are more affordable than their healthy counterparts.   It may be that true affordability requires that community members have sufficient incomes or other resources to purchase, prepare, produce, and/or obtain food needed to maintain consumption of a healthy, culturally acceptable diet on a daily basis without resorting to emergency means.

Healthy

- A common way to define a healthy diet is whether it meets the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines (https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/ dietary-guidelines).   If food is fresh or cooked, and if cooked, the way that it is prepared, are also significant. You might also wish to incorporate elements of environmental and/or humane animal production into your definition of healthy - either as elements of healthy for people in your community and/or healthy for the environment to sustain future generations. If, for example, low or no pesticide residue, animal welfare, antibiotic use in animal production, improvements in general fresh water quality, or other factors are important in your community these can be incorporated as well.

Accessible

- Food accessibility involves multiple dimensions. One dimension that has received much attention is that of spatial proximity of residents to food retailers that offer a variety of healthy food at affordable prices. But the ability of residents to access food retailers also depends on the rate of car ownership and/or the strength of local public transit system. Even if a store is relatively nearby, there may be environmental barriers - highway crossings, bridges, safety concerns – to accessing that retailer. The cultural appropriateness of food may be another important dimension to consider within accessibility. Are foods available that are familiar and that fit with culinary traditions available to residents?

Food System Domains

These goals relate to the food system domains. A food system includes the who, what, where, when, why, and how of our food – from farm to fork. Usually we think of food as following a linear path -- produced on farms, processed, distributed and purchased by consumers. Thinking instead of the food system as a circle reminds us that we are all linked in multiple ways.

We consider the food system comprising six domain areas: *Producing, Processing, Distribution, Retailing, Preparing, and Eating.* The *Producing* domain includes food derived from plants and animals (including fish) through cultivation or harvested from the wild. ***Processing*** includes any transformation, packaging and labeling. ***Distributing*** is wholesaling, storage and transportation. ***Retailing*** includes supermarkets, grocery stores, farmers markets, farmstands. In the ***Preparing*** domain, we consider institutional food service and emergency food programs. Finally, the ***Eating*** domain includes issues of nutrition and consumption, and waste management. (Figure 2) These food system sectors are interconnected; that is, actions in one sector create consequences in other sectors. Figure 2 highlights the six domain areas for food systems.

Figure 2: Food System Domains
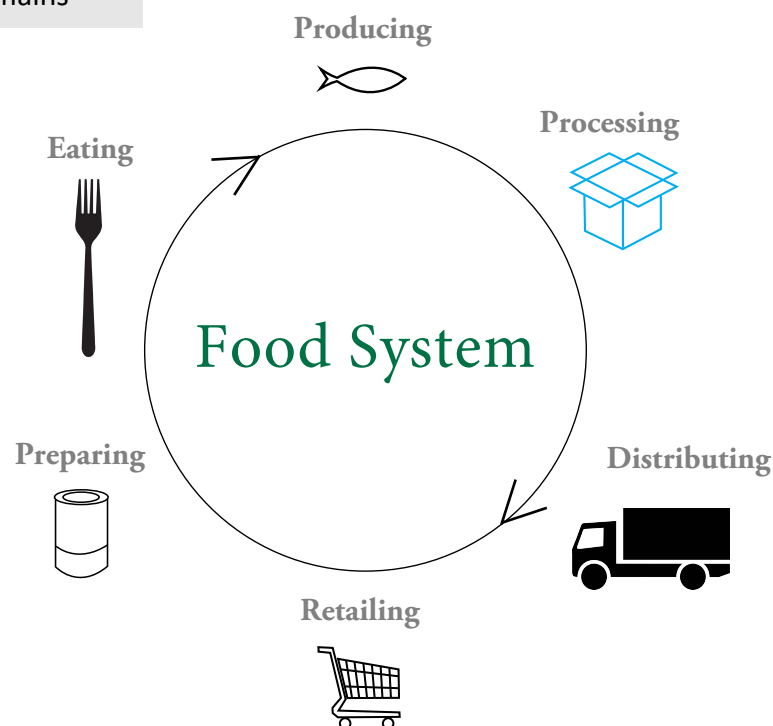
The Multicultural Vision

This framework assumes that a common community vision exists for the partnership. A clearly articulated vision will help guide the assessment and planning phases of the initiative by identifying a clear purpose of those phases and providing a context within which to understand various activities. The vision describes the collaborative's ideal future reality; it helps identify opportunities and gaps with which to compare the current environment; and it takes into account similarities and differences with respect to race/ethnicity. For this reason, the vision should go beyond a mere restating of the goals and be as particular to each community and collaborative as possible.

Community Goals

After defining a broad vision, it might be useful to step back and ask community members what they would like to see as their community level goals. While communities start with a broad vision and goals, it is important to drill down and start thinking about how best to define these concepts in your community. This will probably be different for each community. Whatever boundaries and framing you develop can then be used to guide development of a near-term goal within established timelines.

Where would your community be in the next eight years with respect to this vision? What are the concrete goals your community needs to achieve in the implementation phase of the initiative to make this vision a reality? It can be thought of as a balancing act between audacity and timidity: where would we be concretely in the next eight years if we were 'plausibly bold'? The community goal should articulate what, specifically, you hope to reach within the larger vision of your partnership's goals.

While communities start with the broad vision and goals articulated by their partnership, it is important to drill down and start thinking about how best to define these concepts in your community.

The Assessment Phase

With a vision in place, each collaborative can proceed with an assessment for each of the two major content-oriented focus areas – fitness environments and food systems. While food and fitness each has its own particular settings and issues, the methods and types of information that should be collected tend to be consistent across settings. The purpose of the assessment is to gather both existing and new data (as necessary) to provide the most complete picture of the current community environment as possible. The assessment will identify gaps, opportunities, and potential action strategies for the Community Action Plan.

Three Streams of Information

The assessment phase includes three major "streams" of information that ideally should be collected and analyzed for fitness environments and food systems. The purpose of the three streams is to provide multiple perspectives of the current situation and community context.

Community and Partner Preferences and Perceptions

This stream of information explores what the initiative's key constituents – community residents and partner organizations – experience, believe, care about, and what they are willing to work on. It is generally amenable to group information-gathering meetings and survey techniques, both formal and informal. It also provides an opportunity for engaging youth, community residents and other stakeholders. It is important to explore and address power relationships between community members and government institutions.

- *Typical methods*: Focus groups, formal and informal community meetings, surveys, previous studies, and one-on-one discussions.

Built and Food Environments

This stream of information investigates the physical conditions at both the neighborhood and citywide scale (as feasible and appropriate) and how they could be improved. Existing data compiled by agencies or other initiatives may be relevant. In addition, new data focused on particular locations can also be important. Built environment data generally involve observational assessments and, like community meetings, can provide opportunities for engaging youth, community residents and partner organizations.

- *Typical methods:* Walking audits, GIS data, "Photovoice."

Systems and Policies

This stream of information includes a review of existing policies and plans to identify gaps and opportunities for development. A comprehensive systems assessment goes beyond legislation and public policies (big "P" policy). But systems are also shaped by various little "P" policies, including: organizational leadership, decision making, administrative structures and rules, operating procedures, design guidelines, budgetary practices and priorities, staff training, professional norms and attitudes, and levels of coordination with other related departments or units (little "P" policy"). This information is most amenable to stakeholder (key informant) interviews that provide various perspectives on the system.

It is important to engage key stakeholders, decision makers and change agents who have experience, a sense of local policy history, and existing or potential working relationships.

■ *Typical methods:* Stakeholder interviews, policy audits/analyses, and discussions with informal leaders.

Once these three streams of information are collected for each domain, each collaborative should conduct a preliminary analysis that aims to identify potential options for policy/systems change that emerge from the data.

Systemic or policy opportunities that are consistent with what the collaborative learns from the other two streams of information would be selected as potential options for further examination. The identification of these options is the primary bridge between the assessment phase and the planning phase of the initiative.

The three streams overlap (e.g. community perceptions and built environment perceptions can validate one another) and some methods generate information relevant to another stream (e.g. a stakeholder interview can identify policy flaws in addition to a policy analysis). The three streams of assessment could happen concurrently or sequentially, but they involve different methods and different kinds of people, and some are more labor intensive than others.

It is important to ensure that the collaborative does not conduct an excessive or unnecessary level of assessment or have blinders that limit its sense of the opportunities. Collaboratives should also take full advantage of the assessment phase to engage their communities and partners.

Gap Analysis

What is the gap between now and our intended future? A gap analysis compares the baseline with the community goals. This allows 'seeing' the degree of change required in order for the goal to be achieved. What policies, community relations and structures would need to change for the various components to be achieved? What policies, community relations and structures are currently in place that will help achieve the goal? What are the upstream policies/structures that we would need to influence in order for us to achieve our goals at the program level?

The assessment methods identified in this guide will generate a significant amount of data. One challenge for collaboratives will be to turn the raw data from surveys, focus groups, conversations, neighborhood audits and other sources into valuable information for planning the Community Action Plan. The analysis of assessment findings will set up the creative planning process and inform the collaborative as it generates policy and systems strategies and identifies the most promising targets of change. Some steps in the analysis process can begin shortly after assessment activities have begun, such as ensuring the quality and consistency of the data, summarizing descriptive results, and identifying early findings to follow up on in subsequent assessment steps.

Collaboratives should identify early which partners will be involved in assessment activities and who will conduct analyses, the latter requiring skills in data analysis and interpretation. Local evaluators may play a valuable role, potentially consulting on assessment design, actively working with and guiding the assessment team, and analyzing data. Assessment efforts will also provide opportunities for baseline data collection for the local evaluation.

Most collaboratives should have access to at least some information on food and fitness through existing databases, surveys, reports, or other relevant data sources. These opportunities should be explored during the assessment phase, since local data may exist at little or no cost to the project.

Some collaboratives will delegate certain analysis tasks to different partners. For example, one partner or consultant may be responsible for quantitative data analysis (e.g. surveys) while other partners handle qualitative data (e.g. focus groups, interviews). Regardless of the approach, however, these different methods provide additional perspective beyond any single information source. Thus, any summary findings should look for consistent patterns that emerge from the three streams of information and across neighborhoods and groups.

Likewise, divergent patterns are important to document so that all community members know that they have been heard, and their point of view considered, during the assessment process.

The assessment process can be a valuable process for community engagement, education of partners and community members, and a potential community organizing method. Its other key purpose is to inform the development of the most promising strategic options and ultimately the strategic priorities that form the Community Action Plan. The analysis process must focus on providing accurate and actionable information for planning and prioritization.

The analysis should be mindful of answering the following basic questions:

1. What patterns are arising from the assessment data that would identify potential policy and systems change strategies and targets?

2. What issues from the assessment process are "rising to the top" that:
   - Cut across all three streams of data?
   - Are common to multiple neighborhoods?

3. What are critical issues identified that may be limited to one or two neighborhoods but could have a significant impact on food and fitness related barriers or opportunities?

The Planning Phase

The assessment process is likely to generate far too many policy and systems change strategies than any collaborative will have the time, resources, and energy to address. The collaborative will ideally utilize the information from the assessment and analysis findings to generate a list of *strategic options* that have the promise of impacting food systems and fitness environments in the neighborhoods. Collaboratives should undergo an intentional assessment process to narrow this list of potential options and identify the highest priority strategies for the implementation phase.

In order to identify a set of strategic priorities around which to build a Community Action Plan, the potential options for policy/systems change should be considered in light of three primary prioritizing assessments: **Health Equity, Community Impact, and Feasibility.**

Health Equity

For each potential strategic option, e.g. a policy effort to improve urban school yards, it is important to ask whether it would advance health equity by improving access to healthful opportunities for groups with inequities and narrow "food and fitness" gaps that create disparities in health outcomes, especially by socioeconomic factors such as income and race. While it may be important to select policy/systems change strategies with broad appeal that can mobilize and maintain a vibrant coalition, strategies that do not also increase health equity may fall outside of the initiative's key priorities.

Community Impact

Strategic options should also be reviewed to determine their importance to community health. Policy and systems changes should be analyzed for impact within focus neighborhoods as well as the larger city/ community. While an analysis of impact should be centered on healthy environments and other support systems for healthy behavior, it is also potentially relevant to examine impact on community capacity, political and economic opportunity, social trends, cultural identity and expression, and other items deemed relevant to community health by the communities themselves.

Feasibility

As collaboratives consider a range of strategic options, their initiatives will benefit greatly by considering questions of readiness and feasibility.

Collaboratives should also re-examine feasibility once the final strategic options are selected to ensure that the total package of priorities does not exceed their capacity to facilitate change. An important question to ask: do we need to re-evaluate our goal or is it feasible within a framework of 'plausible boldness'?

Some Readiness and Feasibility Factors Include:

- Political and Economic Climate

- Bureaucratic Barriers

- Quality and Orientation of Existing Leadership

- The Prognosis for Building Quality Relationships in the Future

- Financial Cost/Benefit Considerations

- Community Capacity

- Commitment/Capacity within the Collaborative and its Individual Members

- Timing

After the gap analysis is complete, it is useful to reassess the original goal in light of its feasibility. If it is necessary to revise the goal, try to ensure that it can be reasonably accomplished within the time-frame of the initiative's implementation phase.

Options for policy/systems change that perform well for each of these three assessments should be seriously considered for inclusion in the final list of strategic priorities that form the substance of the Community Action Plan.

In order to maintain a sense of ownership, productive relationships and group confidence in the accountability of the process, it is important that partner organizations and community residents be actively engaged in this part of the process. If it is not feasible to conduct these conversations as a group, the discussion, rationale and results of the analysis should be validated by community leaders and partner organizations. This validation process can also help narrow the final list of priorities.

As a final validation, the collaborative should check again for consistency of each potential strategic priority within the community vision. In cases where the strategic priorities allow the collaborative to further refine their vision and tailor it more specifically to the local community, the collaborative should use that opportunity to advance its communication, engagement, focus and resource development.

Once the strategic priorities are narrowed down and selected, it is time to write the Community Action Plan. The plan will contain important components such as clearly stated goals, objectives and activities, benchmarks and outcome measures, responsibilities and timelines. It will be important to consider additional questions as well. How will resources be leveraged to achieve the goals? How will youth continue to be engaged in the initiative? How will leadership be supported? How will good internal and external communication be maintained? What baseline measures and indicators will be used to measure progress? What flexibility and capacity is available to support important opportunities that arise? As conditions change and learning becomes incorporated into the work, these and other questions will inform the Community Action Plan as a living document and can be viewed as a valuable management tool.

*T*he Community Action Plan contains components such as clearly stated goals, objectives and activities, benchmarks and outcome measures, responsibilities and timelines.
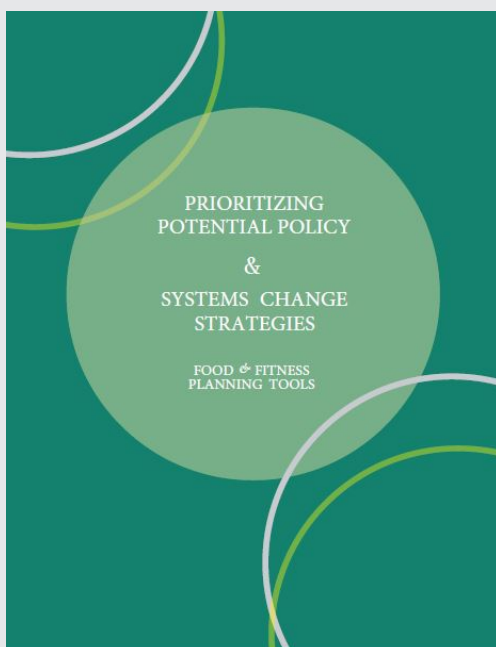
Note about the Food & Fitness Initiative Planning Guide Tools:

*The accompanying tool, **Prioritizing Potential Policy & Systems Change Strategies**, provides greater detail about the assessment and planning process. This tool describes key issues related to food systems and fitness environments, important questions to consider during assessment, and methods for collecting data and gathering community input.*

Module 2

The goal of a broad fitness environment assessment is to identify existing gaps in neighborhoods, organizations, and the larger community that relate to routine physical activity, otherwise known as "active living." A guiding presumption of this document is that routine physical activity is heavily influenced by the built environment and the organizations with which we interact every day. The sections below offer perspective and basic guidance on elements of an assessment of school fitness environments. This planning series includes four domains: School System, Parks & Recreation, Active Transportation, and Community Design/ Land Use.

Key School Fitness Environment Issues

The School System domain, especially the institutional policies that govern site selection, curriculum, and off-hours use of school facilities, can either encourage or inhibit physical activity among children. The sections below summarize the key issues and challenges communities face when encouraging physical activity in school settings and identify the opportunities to address built environment and policy barriers to physical activity. It also includes guiding questions for an assessment process and suggested methods for collecting information.

Getting To and From School

Engaging children and young adults in active transportation to school increases students' daily quantity of physical activity before classes begin. Active transportation for school children includes walking, biking and small-wheeled transport such as skating, skateboarding, or push scooters. According to the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, the distance from school is the most commonly reported barrier to active transportation to and from school. As larger schools are built away from neighborhoods to accommodate more students, fewer children live close enough to routinely walk or bike. A suggested policy solution is altering the school site selection process to encourage smaller neighborhood schools. For many communities, however, this policy solution would need to account for segregation by race/ ethnicity and income.

Getting To and From School
Continued

The second most commonly reported reason for not engaging in active transportation to school is the traffic danger. Heavy automotive traffic and the absence of sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes and other safe routes increase students' risk in traveling to school. Other limiting factors are violence, crime within the community, and the fear of crimes against children such as abduction or gang activity. Built environment changes may include street-level improvements such as the construction of sidewalks, bike paths, and trails, marked and raised crosswalks, additional or modified street signage including flashing speed limit signs, and traffic calming measures including roundabouts, medians, and curb extensions. Policy strategies aimed at improving active transportation include enforcing speed limits, reconsidering school policies that restrict walking and biking to school, greater law enforcement presence, and locating crossing guards at busy or dangerous intersections. Many communities have addressed both traffic danger and crime concerns by initiating a *Walking School Bus Program* where adult volunteers walk a small group of students to school along a designated route with set pick-up locations. Other approaches to allay fears about crime on the route to school include street and sidewalk lighting improvements and neighborhood watch programs.

During School

During the school day, physical education classes and recess provide opportunities for physical activity. Physical education equips students with knowledge and skills to live active lives and has the potential to improve academic performance. Currently, physical education in many U.S. schools is deficient in quantity and quality, particularly in low wealth schools. In general, school administrators are not held accountable for physical education under the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, and many administrators and teachers place little or no academic value on physical education. Many schools fall below national guidelines for the amount of physical education offered to students, and there is little monitoring and enforcement even when requirements are in place. Certain states allow exemptions, so many high school students may not take any physical education. Budget constraints have contributed to the reduction or elimination of physical education classes, and personnel deficiencies limit both the variety of courses available and the total number of classes offered each week. Additionally, many schools have reduced or eliminated recess for elementary school students, limiting another opportunity for students to be physically active.

Physical education also suffers from poor or inconsistent quality. Many students do not spend the recommended minutes in physical education class (150/week for elementary, 225/week for secondary); classes are too large for students to achieve and maintain the recommended level of sustained vigorous activity; and the classes often lack quality fields, indoor space, and equipment. The shortage of qualified, credentialed teachers and limited opportunities for professional development offered to existing teachers also affects the quality of physical education classes.

Policy changes to address the quantity and quality deficiencies observed in physical education include improvements to the monitoring and enforcement of state physical education requirements, employment of certified physical education teachers, adoption of activity-focused curricula, provision of professional development opportunities for teachers, and elimination of the use or withholding of physical activity as a punishment.

After School

Given that the majority of physical activity among young people occurs outside of school hours, developmentally appropriate physical activity programs are an important strategy for increasing physical activity. There are, however, a number of barriers to the availability, accessibility, and desirability of after-school programs.

Inadequate resources affect the variety of activities offered and contribute to inadequately trained sports and recreation staff. Budget constraints also limit staffing and facility hours after school, during weekends and breaks. Budget cuts in many school districts result in a "pay to play" system that can limit participation from lower-income youth. Finally, many programs and agencies emphasize competitive after-school sports and intramurals, which can be a barrier for students with lower skill levels, who are physically unfit, or who may not be attracted to team sports.

Collaboration between schools and other agencies can begin to address these barriers. Joint-use agreements encourage the development, maintenance and use of facilities by schools and the surrounding community. Collaboration between schools and the community can result in the use of community resources to provide equipment through sponsorship, the coordination of staffing and access to facilities. Other strategies aimed at after-school programs should address the provision of a variety of competitive and noncompetitive sports and recreation; safe and adequate equipment and instruction; amenities such as cool water and shade; protection from violence and exposure to environmental hazards; and staff training in injury prevention, first aid, and skill development.

☁ Key School Fitness Environment Questions

Systems and Policies

1. What policies or procedures do schools have in place to:

- Encourage active transportation to and from school (e.g., walking, biking, small-wheeled transport such as skating)?

- Provide safe equipment and other amenities for active play?

- Provide a safe playground and indoor facilities for active play?

- Provide daily recess breaks for unstructured play?

- Meet or exceed requirements for minimum minutes of physical education?

- Recruit the expertise of trained physical educators, or provide training to teachers, to lead high quality physical activity sessions?

- Provide various physical activity options that reflect the interests and diversity of program attendees (ranging from competitive sports to dance and individual fitness activities)?

- Make their facilities available to children, adolescents, and adults outside of school hours or when school is not in session for physical activity programs (e.g., before school, after school, evenings, weekends or school vacation)?

Continued on next page

Systems and Policies Continued

- Provide time to engage in a variety of physical activity options?

- Provide training to staff to lead activity sessions and model positive activity behaviors?

- Serve water to drink; and have clean sources of tap water and/or working water fountains?

- Provide transportation home for students who participate in after-school intramural activities or physical activity clubs?

- Adjust or waive fee structures for students who cannot afford to pay for physical activity programs?

2. How could all of the above mentioned policies and practices be improved?

3. If the stakeholder is unable to answer any of these assessment questions what new capacities need to be built within the school system to develop this knowledge?

Community/Partner Preferences

1. **How important do community stakeholders (including parents and children) consider the following issues:**

   - Safe and direct walking/biking routes to and from school
   - Distance between homes and school
   - Neighborhood crime and security in school vicinity
   - Availability of safe equipment and other amenities
   - Availability of safe playground facilities
   - Availability of safe indoor facilities for physical activity
   - Daily recess breaks and their length
   - Daily minimum minutes of physical education
   - Staff training in physical education
   - Variety of physical activity programs at or after school and their duration
   - Water availability
   - Transportation home from after school activities
   - Fee structures for programs

2. **Where the above items are considered inadequate, why do stakeholders think this is the case?**

3. **Which of the above items are most consistently identified as a priority for community stakeholders?**

Built Environment

1. **What outdoor and indoor physical facilities are available at schools to support:**

   - Active transportation to/from school? (e.g. sidewalks, bike racks, crosswalks, signals, crossing guards, bike lanes, greenways, etc.)

   - Unstructured play during recess for a variety of age groups (e.g. play structures, grass fields, blacktop, covered areas, water fountains, shade trees, etc.)

   - Structured physical education and other physical activity for a variety of age groups (e.g. balls and other sports equipment, gyms, fields, tracks, pools, all-purpose rooms, cones, ropes, mats, etc.)

   - After-school physical activity programs for a variety of age groups (e.g. same as above)

   - Sports and other physical activity programs for the community outside of school hours for a variety of age groups (e.g. same as above)

2. **In cases where facilities are inadequate or missing, how could they be improved?**

3. **Which facilities are most consistently inadequate or missing across low-income communities and throughout the larger community/city?**

Methods for Assessing School Fitness Environments

	Purpose	What	Who
Systems and Policies	Identify school system barriers and policy opportunities	**Stakeholder interviews of:** district superintendent or staff, principals, pupil transportation manager, PTA leadership, lead PE teachers, **Policy document analysis of:** wellness policy, joint-use guidelines, PE curriculum requirements, school site selection policies/processes	Partners, consultants, potentially student interns
Community and Partner Preferences	Determine physical activity barriers before, during, and after school	**Focus groups** of students and parents **Information gathering** at PTA meetings **Intercept interviews** of parents at drop-off/pick-up **"Hand-raise" surveys** of student's travel choice to school	Partners, parents, volunteers, children, student interns
Built Environment	Assess safety and amenability of the walk zone radius around school; evaluate playgrounds and indoor spaces	**Walking audits** of perimeter streets and connecting routes **Playground assessments** for quality, safety and accessibility **Indoor facility audits** for quality and accessibility	Partners, parents, volunteers, children, student interns

Module 3

3 Assessing Parks & Recreation Fitness Environments

The goal of a broad fitness environment assessment is to identify existing gaps in neighborhoods, organizations, and the larger community that relate to routine physical activity, otherwise known as "active living." A guiding presumption of this document is that routine physical activity is heavily influenced by the built environment and the organizations with which we interact every day. The sections below offer perspective and basic guidance on elements of an assessment of parks & recreation fitness environments. This planning series includes four domains: School System, Parks & Recreation, Active Transportation, and Community Design/ Land Use.

Key Parks & Recreation Fitness Environment Issues

Parks, greenways, trails, and indoor recreation facilities provide opportunities for physical activity through the completion of daily routine tasks and recreation. A growing body of evidence shows the linkages between access and physical activity, although more information is needed about how the availability, type, size and quality of parks, trails, greenways and recreation facilities contribute to levels of physical activity. This section describes the linkages between physical activity and access to, programming in, and maintenance of parks, trails, greenways and indoor recreation facilities. In addition, it summarizes the challenges communities face when constructing and maintaining parks, trails, greenways, and indoor recreation facilities and the opportunities to encourage physical activity through the construction of these community resources. Guiding questions for an assessment process and suggested methods for collecting information are also provided.

Availability

All Americans do not enjoy equal access to parks or indoor recreation facilities. Low income, Latino, African American, and Asian American/Pacific Islander neighborhoods were less likely to be near parks and playgrounds than people who live in wealthier neighborhoods and in predominantly White communities (Bell & Lee, 2011; Gies 2006).

Bell, J., & Lee, M. (2011). Why place and race matter. PolicyLink. Retrieved from http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/WHY_PLACE_AND_RACE%20MATTER_FULL%20REPORT_WEB.PDF

Gies, E. (2006). The Health Benefits of Parks: How Parks Help Keep Americans and Their Communities Fit and Healthy. San Francisco, CA: The Trust for Public Land. Retrieved from: http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits_HealthBenefitsReport.pdf

The inequitable distribution of parks contributes to the higher risk of these populations to obesity and obesity-related diseases. The provision of parks, trails, and greenways in lower-income communities is also important because because gym memberships and other indoor recreation can be more costly opportunities for physical activity.

When available and affordable, indoor recreation facilities provide physical activity opportunities throughout the year, regardless of the weather, and can concentrate facilities such as indoor courts, pools, and equipment in one place. However, to meet the needs of neighboring communities, indoor recreation facilities must be constructed to accommodate both the current and future population. Competing priorities for funding (e.g., education, law enforcement, job creation) within low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, the high threshold for public finance measures, and fewer conservation organizations can create barriers to public financing of parks, trails, and greenways. Still, communities of color are willing to vote for initiatives that fund the creation and maintenance of open space. For example, in a national poll conducted by the *Trust for Public Land* and the *Nature Conservancy*, 77% of Latino voters were willing to support new conservation funding measures, compared with 65% of all voters. Statewide exit polls for California's Proposition 40, which included $2.6 billion for parks, clean water, and clear air

showed support from 77% of African American, 74% of Latino, 60% of Asian, American/Pacific Islander, 56% of White voters, and 75% of voters making under $20,000 per year.

One way to help address the availability of parks, trails, and greenways is to create and use standards for park creation, development, and management with measures such as minimum acres per number of residents, actual benefits to residents, property value improvements, and other measurable outcomes. Other policy strategies include integrating parks into the redevelopment of low-income neighborhoods with large numbers of vacant lots and brownfields; using developer impact fees to create and maintain parks, trails, and greenways; and leveraging private and public financing for park creation and maintenance.

Design and Maintenance

The availability of parks, trails, greenways, and indoor facilities is not the only factor affecting accessibility to local communities. The design and staffing can encourage or inhibit physical activity in these spaces. Reduction in park budgets have contributed to the neglect of the built environment, leaving fields and equipment in disrepair. Physical features such as restroom facilities, drinking fountains, and shade may be absent, in a dilapidated state, or inaccessible to persons living with disabilities.

Design and Maintenance
Continued

Policy strategies to address these shortcomings include increasing community involvement in the advocacy for park funding and in the maintenance of parks, trails and greenways using the "Friends of" model, and joint-use agreements with local schools for cost-sharing purposes. Similarly to parks, the presence of greenways and trails can enhance physical activity. Design features such as connectivity between common local and regional destinations and the selection of surface materials that minimize maintenance needs and trip hazards and maximize usability are built environment strategies that can increase the use of trails and greenways for physical activity.

Safety and fear of crime are additional concerns that can limit the utilization of local parks, trails and greenways. After years of neglect and reduction in staffing, many park, trails, and greenways attract crime and violence. The design of spaces can obscure sight lines and create spaces where criminals can hide, contributing to a general sense of being unsafe. Design solutions that enhance visibility, such as improved lighting and maintenance that keeps vegetation low, coupled with supervision from paid and volunteer personnel, security cameras, emergency phones, and police presence are policy strategies to address safety concerns.

Cohen, D., Sehgal, A., Williamson, S., Sturm, R., McKenzie, T. L., Lara, R., & Lurie, N. (2006). Park Use and Physical Activity in a Sample of Public Parks in the City of Los Angeles. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from: https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR357.html

Programming

The number and type of programs available at local parks, greenways, and trails can influence their usage for physical activity. For example, observation data from eight public parks in Los Angeles suggested increased usage of specific areas for physical activity when organized, structured activities were available (Cohen et al., 2006). Individual preferences linked with age, race/ethnicity, gender, and exercise habits also influence usage. In the Los Angeles study, both men and women utilized jogging tracks, tennis courts and playgrounds at similar rates, but males were more likely to be engaged in vigorous physical activity while women often were at playgrounds supervising children. Seniors were observed utilizing the park facilities less frequently. As a result, a variety of age, gender, and culturally-appropriate programming may increase the use of parks, greenways, and trails for physical activity. Similarly, programming offered by indoor recreation facilities should be available to multiple ages, skill levels, and be ethnically and culturally appropriate. Community-wide surveys can help gather ethnic, cultural, and gender preferences of activities as well as identify possible barriers to the facility's use.

Key Parks & Recreation Fitness Environment Questions

Systems and Policies

1. **How up-to-date and well integrated is the community's park and recreation plan or trails and greenways master plan in relation to other priorities and plans?**

2. **What policies or procedures does local government have in place to:**

   - Improve the percentage of residents living less than one- quarter mile from a major park, trail, greenway or indoor recreation facility? *(note: If rural, consider using less than a 15-minute drive)*

   - Lower financial barriers to low-income individuals or families who wish to use recreational facilities or programs? How and from whom does it leverage private funds for this purpose?

   - Increase equitable access to parks, trails, greenways and indoor recreation facilities for communities with inequities (i.e. communities of color, low-income children, elderly, people with disabilities)? How effectively do redevelopment policies and practices encourage the development of parks and recreation facilities or use them as a catalyst for new development?

   - Improve safe connections to parks, trails, greenways and indoor recreation facilities by walking, biking or use of public transit? (e.g. ped/bike facilities, well designed bus routes and waiting areas, subdivision easements, etc.)

Continued on next page

Systems and Policies Continued

- Ensure that recreation facilities and programs are meeting the needs and preferences of current users? Where and when are facilities and programs underused or oversubscribed? Who uses the facilities and programs and for what purpose?

- Ensure that recreation facilities and programs are meeting the needs and preferences of users in the community? How effectively does the park system communicate with and market itself to potential users, especially in low-income communities of color? How are community voices included in parks and recreation planning?

- Ensure that recreation facilities and programs are planned to meet the needs and preferences of future users as community demographics change? What are the trends in the use of recreational facilities and programs?

- Ensure sufficient assets and resources to meet the system's goals? How does it leverage private resources or partner with voluntary and nonprofit organizations such as "friends" groups or "conservancies"? Does it balance its budget between operating and capital funds? Where do the system's resources come from for facilities, programs, maintenance and security, and how expandable or renewable are they?How could it better measure and communicate its outcomes and its cost-efficiency to the public and its decision makers?

- Manage land, facilities or programs in joint use with a school district? What arrangements are possible for sharing the costs of utilities, maintenance, security, janitorial, equipment, etc.?

- Meet its routine maintenance responsibilities for existing and planned facilities? How can current resources or partnerships be better applied to meet maintenance needs? What additional resources or methods may be available for maintenance?

- Provide safety and security for existing and planned facilities and programs? What additional resources may be available for security? How and to what extent does the park and recreation system deploy uniformed park personnel that are visible? How and to what extent does the system collect data on crime at or around their sites and/or analyze the relationship between youth crime and their services?

- Overcome liability concerns related to use of the facilities?

- Strengthen community involvement in the system? How responsive is the system to community feedback?

3. **How could all of the above-mentioned policies and procedures be improved?**

4. **If the park and recreation system is unable to answer any of the assessment questions, what new capacities need to be built within the system to develop this knowledge and help ensure delivery of quality services?**

Community/Partner Preferences

1. **How important do community stakeholders (including parents and children) consider the following issues related to parks, trails and greenways and indoor recreation:**

   - Proximity and access to facilities

   - Safe connections via ped/bike/transit

   - Capacity of facilities and programs and related funding issues

   - Quality of facilities and programs

   - Appropriate match of facilities and programs with recreational needs/desires

   - Joint use opportunities with schools

   - Maintenance of facilities

   - Safety and security of facilities

   - Fee structures for programs

   - Liability concerns

   - Community involvement in programming and maintenance

2. **Where the above items are considered inadequate, why do stakeholders believe this is the case?**

3. **Which of the above items are most consistently identified as a priority for community stakeholders?**

Built Environment

1. In what neighborhoods is proximity to parks, trails, greenways and/or indoor recreational facilities insufficient? (e.g. more than a one-quarter mile or, if rural, more than a 15-minute drive)

2. How are various types of facilities distributed throughout the community? What new facilities are needed and where?

3. Which facilities or features are most consistently inadequate or missing across low-income communities and throughout the community/city?

4. What primary barriers exist for community residents to safely reach recreational facilities by walking, biking or transit? (e.g. traffic, crime, highway, fencing, etc.) Where are these barriers most numerous or difficult?

5. What facilities and programs currently have insufficient capacity to serve the community demand and for what purposes? Where are the programs with capacity deficiencies?

6. In what ways do current facilities and programs fail to match the preferences and cultural priorities of community members?How could they be improved to match these preferences and priorities for existing and future users?

7. How could existing or planned facilities and programs be designed, equipped and/or staffed to serve community needs better and invite greater use? (e.g. trail or play surfaces inviting wider use, more flexible gym space, replacement or redesign of underused facilities/programs, etc.)

8. How could existing or planned facilities and programs be designed, equipped and/or staffed invite active use
    through various seasons of the year? (e.g. ice rinks or heated pools in winter, shade trees and water elements
    for summer, etc.)

9. Where and how could schoolyards and facilities be improved and/or made more accessible for public use outside of school hours? How could planned parks or recreation facilities be co-located with schools (or current ones improved) to provide better recreational and fitness facilities for students during or after school?

10. What are the primary deficiencies in recreational facility maintenance across the community? In what neighborhoods or types of facilities are these deficiencies greatest?

11. How could parks and other recreational facilities be designed or retrofitted or better maintained to improve safety and security? (e.g. surfaces, lighting, sight lines, garbage and graffiti abatement, defensible space, etc.) What physical features or uses could increase use (i.e. natural surveillance) during less secure times of day?

12. What physical features might allay liability concerns that are prohibiting construction or use of needed facilities?
    (e.g. signage, lighting, safe crossings, etc.)

13. What natural spaces or features are accessible for safe and inviting recreational use? (e.g. bodies of water, forests, fields, etc.) What geographic patterns exist between neighborhoods for their accessibility? How can these places be preserved for public use?

14. In cases where facilities or features are inadequate or missing, how could they be improved?

Methods for Assessing Parks & Recreation Fitness Environments

	Purpose	What	Who
Systems and Policies	Identify park and recreation system barriers and policy opportunities	**Stakeholder interviews of:** Parks and Recreation staff and citizen advisory boards, planning staff and citizen advisory boards, department of transportation staff, indoor recreation facility management, school system leadership (joint-use agreements), local conservation or "Friends of" organizations, law enforcement; **Policy document analysis of:** parks, recreation, greenway, and trail master plans and joint-use facility agreements	Partners, consultants, potentially student interns
Community and Partner Preferences	Determine user, programming, safety, and design preferences	**Focus groups of** park, greenway, trail, and indoor recreation users; **Information gathering at** neighborhood association community organization meetings; disability advisory council meetings; **Intercept interviews of** parks, greenway, trails, and indoor recreation users; mailed, door-to-door, **Telephone, or internet surveys** of user preferences for parks and recreation	Partners, parents, volunteers, children, student interns
Built Environment	Assess safety and amenability of the park, greenway, and trail, review walkability and bikeability to and from parks, trails, greenways, and indoor recreation facilities; evaluate playgrounds and indoor spaces	**Walking audits** of perimeter streets and connecting routes **Park, trail, and greenway assessments** for quality, safety and accessibility **Indoor facility audits** for quality and accessibility	Partners, parents, volunteers, children, student interns

Module 4

ASSESSING ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION
FITNESS ENVIRONMENTS

4 Assessing Active Transportation Fitness Environments

The goal of a broad fitness environment assessment is to identify existing gaps in neighborhoods, organizations, and the larger community that relate to routine physical activity, otherwise known as "active living." A guiding presumption of this document is that routine physical activity is heavily influenced by the built environment and the organizations with which we interact every day. The sections below offer perspective and basic guidance on elements of an assessment of school fitness environments. This planning series includes four domains: School System, Parks & Recreation, Active Transportation, and Community Design/Land Use.

Key Active Transportation Fitness Environment Issues

Active transportation includes walking, biking, public transit and other active means of mobility and can be a part of routine physical activity. A community's transportation system determines the accessibility, safety, comfort, and feasibility for traveling actively. This system impacts not only how people move from place to place, but also the fundamental character of communities and the choices and opportunities that are available. This section summarizes the key physical activity issues and challenges related to the transportation system, as well as opportunities to address built environment and policy barriers to active travel. It also includes guiding questions for an assessment process and suggested methods for collecting information.

Access to Destinations

In recent decades, the U.S. transportation system has developed to favor motor vehicle travel. This has resulted in an environment that many experience as unsafe and uninviting for pedestrians, bicyclists, and others who are unable or choose not to drive a car.

The lack of connectivity within the transportation system presents a barrier for active travel. Governments and developers have moved away from developing traditional urban grid-type street patterns and turned to a more dispersed suburban style, which tends to concentrate motor vehicle traffic onto fewer arterial and collector roads with higher speed limits.

In addition to higher vehicle speeds, this system features long, meandering streets with limited options to get to destinations by foot, bicycle, and transit. Local governments can address disconnected street networks through connectivity ordinances, which require that new roads and developments provide multiple connections and shorter block lengths. Off-road paths and greenways can also be part of an interconnected transportation network. Many communities have paved greenways that provide separation from motor vehicles and are inviting to use for recreation and transportation. In fact, most novice bicyclists prefer not having to share the travel lane with cars and trucks. However, paths and greenways for walking and bicycling typically have limited interface with the street system. They are often viewed solely as recreational facilities, which must be accessed via a car trip. City planners and other government officials should plan for future greenways and integrate them into the street network. Trails can encourage new users when sections that intersect with streets are well marked and safely integrated with car and truck traffic.

Safety

Motor vehicle speed is the number one danger to pedestrians. Motorists driving at higher speeds are less likely to see pedestrians, and are more likely to cause serious injury or death in a crash involving a pedestrian. Residents of neighborhoods with high speed traffic often choose not to walk due to very real safety concerns.

Motor vehicle speed is commonly perceived to be a speed limit enforcement issue, i.e. drivers are not observing posted speed limits and police are unable to enforce existing laws. While these reasons are compelling, roadway design also influences the speed of vehicles and the perception of safety by pedestrians and bicyclists.

Roadway engineering has improved greatly to make driving as efficient, safe and convenient as it has ever been. The unintended outcome, however, is a network of high speed streets that lack basic pedestrian safety features, such as sidewalks, intersections designed for safe pedestrian movement, crosswalks, clear signage, and connected off-road paths or greenways. Likewise, roads are often not engineered with bike lanes and other accommodations that could encourage people to feel safe on a bicycle. Roads are often built at "design speeds" that are higher than the intended speed limits. As a result, neighborhood streets and collector roads are often too wide and encourage drivers to speed. In urban neighborhoods, one-way and multi-lane streets are common and encourage higher speeds. While these passageways allow the efficient flow motor vehicles in and out of central business districts, they also bisect neighborhoods and restrict safe movement within communities.

Connectivity and safety of our transportation system are related in that together they provide an overall environment that can put active transportation on a more level playing field with travel by motor vehicle. Residents living within neighborhoods with connected street networks and continuous sidewalks are more likely to walk for certain trips than residents of other neighborhoods with fewer continuous sidewalks and less connected street networks. Many communities are moving away from overdesigning their streets for speed and have upgraded roadway design standards for new and resurfaced roads. New standards will result in streets that are narrow enough to slow automobile and truck traffic in commercial districts and within neighborhoods. To calm traffic and accommodate pedestrians and bicycles, engineers are gradually converting some one-way thoroughfares back into two-way streets and narrowing vehicle travel lanes through "road diets." In addition, local governments are increasingly identifying ways to finance routine sidewalk construction and maintenance, as well as better signage and improved intersection crossings for pedestrians.

Equity

An equitable transportation system offers choices and encourages active travel for people with different needs. Many people do not drive and depend on public transit or others to drive them, particularly older adults, children, people with disabilities, and residents with lower incomes.

Older adults and people with disabilities who cannot drive, but are otherwise able to get around - via transit, walking, and wheeling - may have difficulty negotiating most streets and intersections. Transit stops may feel unsafe and be disconnected from sidewalks. Well designed intersections that feature American Disability Act (ADA)-approved curb ramps, pedestrian count-down timers, visible signage, and quality lighting, tend to be limited to downtown business districts. Additionally, pedestrian signals at busy intersections typically accommodate the walking pace of an average adult, which provides insufficient crossing time for older adults and people with disabilities.

National Complete Streets Coalition (*https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/ national-complete-streets-coalition/*) is an emerging campaign to achieve greater transportation equity. The message is simple: streets are public assets and they are not complete unless they accommodate all users. In addition to motor vehicles, streets are complete when they also serve pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, older adults, people with disabilities, and children.

Campaign advocates encourage local governments and transportation authorities to adopt Complete Streets policies to reform street design standards, development ordinances, and other rules governing the transportation system.

Many communities are striving to recreate themselves as walkable communities. Recent studies have shown that people who live in pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods are more likely to walk. Local leaders can address system-wide transportation challenges for pedestrians and bicyclists through comprehensive planning, focused advisory boards, enhanced zoning and development ordinances, training for transportation and public works staff, transportation demand management policies and programs (e.g. free transit passes; transportation improvement districts; alternative parking policies; guaranteed ride home policies, etc.) and dedicated capital funding to support active transportation.

NATIONAL COMPLETE STREETS COALITION

Smart Growth America
Improving Lives by Improving Communities

───────────────

Streets are a vital part of livable, attractive communities.

───────────────

Everyone, regardless of age, ability, income, race, or ethnicity, ought to have safe, comfortable, and convenient access to community destinations and public places– whether walking, driving, bicycling, or taking public transportation. But too many of our streets are designed only for speeding cars or creeping traffic jams.

A Complete Streets approach integrates people and place in the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of our transportation networks. This helps to ensure streets are safe for people of all ages and abilities, balance the needs of different modes, and support local land uses, economies, cultures, and natural environments.

The National Complete Streets Coalition, which launched this movement in 2004, promotes the development and implementation of Complete Streets policies and professional practices. To date, over 1140 agencies at the local, regional, and state levels have adopted Complete Streets policies, totaling over 1200 policies nationwide.

Key Active Transportation Fitness Environment Questions

Systems and Policies

1. **How up-to-date and well integrated are the community's pedestrian, bicycling and transit plans in relation to other city priorities and plans?**

2. **What policies or procedures does local government have in place to:**

    - Establish a multi-disciplinary committee/board to advise the mayor or council about opportunities for improving active transportation?

    - Adopt a target level of walking or bicycle use (e.g. percent of trips) and safety to be achieved within a specific timeframe, and improve data collection necessary to monitor progress?

    - Provide an integrated network of on- and off-street ped/bike facilities and low-speed streets throughout the community with adequate signage?

    - Require connectivity for new streets and neighborhoods? do plans and public investments consciously and safely integrate trail and greenways with on-road ped/bike facilities?

    - Complete the sidewalks and streets with pedestrian and bicycle-friendly facilities that support walking and biking?How do they apply to both new streets and retrofitting or resurfacing existing streets? do they include specific and measurable standards for engineers to use?

    Continued on next page

- Equitably distribute ped/bike/transit friendly facilities in all neighborhoods and for all types of users? (e.g. communities of color, low-income children, elderly, people with disabilities) Where are ped/bike facilities and transit service strong or weak?Why?

- Establish information programs to promote active transportation for all purposes, and to communicate the many benefits of active transportation to residents and businesses?(e.g. with maps, campaigns, neighborhood walks/rides,
a walk/ride with the mayor)

- Encourage walking and bicycling among public employees?
(e.g. by providing incentives, parking, showers and lockers and/or establishing a city bicycle fleet)

- Establish requirements or incentives for transportation demand management (TDM) measures? (e.g. free transit passes to new residents and employees; funding for staff to coordinate a parking district or transportation improvement district; in-lieu fees instead of building parking; traffic impact fees to fund traffic reduction programs; parking cash-out for employees)

- Ensure that all city policies, plans, codes, and programs are implemented to take advantage of every opportunity to create a more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly community? Does the city have a pedestrian and bicycle coordinator position in its department of public works or transportation?

- Ensure that capital investments are consistent with and sufficient to meet active transportation goals and priorities?

- Train and encourage its staff in all departments, but especially its transportation engineers, to better design facilities and enable active transportation? (e.g. context sensitive design, complete streets, etc.)

- Educate all road users to share the road and interact safely?

- Lower vehicle speeds in neighborhoods and near popular destinations or centers of activity?

- Address design speeds of roads as well as speed limits and signage? Do they provide for traffic calming to existing streets and link investments to areas of primary safety risk?

- Enforce traffic laws to improve the safety and comfort of all road users, with a particular focus on behaviors and attitudes that cause motor vehicles to crash with pedestrians or cyclists?

- Encourage walking and biking in communities where significant segments of the population do not drive and where short trips are most common?

- Promote inter-modal travel between public transit, walking and bicycling? (e.g. by putting bike racks on buses, improving access and facilities at bus stops and train stations, and improving access to public transportation)

- Require amenities and features that make streets more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists? (e.g. benches, lighting, trees and landscaping, water fountains, public art, directional signage and trash cans)

3. How could all of the aforementioned policies and procedures be improved and applied more equitably?

4. If the transportation system is unable to answer any of the assessment questions, what new capacities need to be built within the system to develop this knowledge and help ensure delivery of quality transportation opportunities?

Community/Partner Preferences

1. **How important do community stakeholders (including parents and children) consider the following issues:**

- Good planning for active transportation

- Targets, timeframes, and data for walking or bicycle use and safety

- Complete streets policies for ped/bike facilities

- Integrated and signed ped/bike network throughout the community

- Equitable distribution of ped/bike/transit friendly facilities in all neighborhoods and for all types of users

- Information programs to promote active transportation for residents and businesses

- Encourage walking and bicycling among public employees

- Transportation demand management measures

- Focus on implementation of plans, codes, and programs related to active transportation

- Consistency of capital investments with transportation goals and priorities

Continued on next page

Community/Partner Preferences Continued

- Staff training (especially transportation and public works)

- Safety education

- Lower vehicle speeds in neighborhoods and near centers of activity

- Enforcement of traffic laws to improve the safety and comfort of all road users

- Special encouragement where less people drive and where short trips are more common

- Inter-modal travel between public transit, walking and bicycling

- Amenities and features that make streets more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists

2. **Where the above items are considered inadequate, why do stakeholders think this is the case?**

3. **Which of the above items are most consistently identified as a priority for community stakeholders?**

Built Environment

1. **Are pedestrian/bicycling facilities (e.g. sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks and signals, benches, racks, design amenities):**

    - Available on major transportation routes between centers of activity? (e.g. residential neighborhoods, employment and shopping centers, schools, parks, libraries, groceries/farmers markets, etc.)

    - Available where they are most needed to ensure safety and comfort for pedestrians and cyclists? (e.g. wide or high speed roads, areas with high likelihood of potential conflicts with motor vehicles, etc.)

    - Separated from traffic (i.e. dedicated pathways) as well as on road?

    - Part of a larger, integrated and signed pedestrian/bike network that connects a variety of major destinations in a convenient way?

    - Combined with street design, speed limits and traffic law enforcement that ensure safety for all users and comfort for pedestrians and cyclists?

    - Equitably distributed across all neighborhoods and for all types of users?

    - Well integrated with quality public transportation service? (i.e. routes, stations/stops, racks on buses, etc.)

    - Combined with street amenities that pedestrians and cyclists find attractive? (e.g. trees/landscaping, art, benches, cafes, lighting, signage, etc.)

2. **Which pedestrian/bike/transit facilities or related street features are most consistently missing and/or inadequate across low-income communities and throughout the city?**

3. **In cases where ped/bike/transit facilities or related street features are missing and/or inadequate, how could they be improved?**

Methods for Assessing Active Transportation Fitness Environments

	Purpose	What	Who
Systems and Policies	Identify transportation system barriers and policy opportunities	**Stakeholder interviews of:** city planners, transportation engineers, public works staff, transit officials, pedestrian advocates, elected officials, other community leaders. **Policy document analysis of:** transportation master plans, ped and/or bicycle plans, capital funding processes/ priorities, street design standards, subdivision ordinances.	Partners, transportation and planning consultants, potentially student interns
Community and Partner Preferences	Determine barriers and preferences for active transportation to/from work, shopping, recreation	**Focus groups of** of citizens, including older adults, people with disabilities and low income; **Information gathering at** neighborhood meetings; **Intercept interviews of** people walking and bicycling; **Surveys** of citizens' travel choices.	Partners, parents, volunteers, student interns
Built Environment	Assess safety and amenability of walking, bicycling, and transit as modes of transportation	**Walking audits** of streets, intersections and transit stops **GIS data** from local government and/or regional transporation authority.	Partners, parents, volunteers, student interns, transportation and planning consultants

Module 5

ASSESSING COMMUNITY DESIGN/LAND
USE FITNESS ENVIRONMENTS

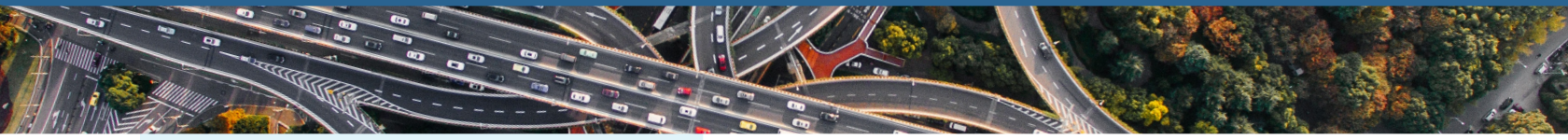# 5 Assessing Community Design/Land Use Fitness Environments

The goal of a broad fitness environment assessment is to identify existing gaps in neighborhoods, organizations, and the larger community that relate to routine physical activity, otherwise known as "active living." A guiding presumption of this document is that routine physical activity is heavily influenced by the built environment and the organizations with which we interact every day. The sections below offer perspective and basic guidance on elements of an assessment of school fitness environments. This planning series includes four domains: School System, Parks & Recreation, Active Transportation, and Community Design/ Land Use.

Community Design/Land Use

Obesity and excess weight play a significant role in death and disability and are strongly influenced by physical inactivity.

The physical layout of communities, or land use, can have a profound effect on the ease or difficulty individuals may face when engaging in physical activity.

Key Community Design/ Land Use Fitness Environment Issues

Land use refers to the way different activities are located relative to the land and to each other. It influences the fundamental character of our communities and our lifestyles by determining what land is developed and for what purpose, where and how far apart our destinations are, what kinds of activities can happen in a given space, who can live next to whom or what, and what choices people have in getting from place to place. Most current land use policies are oriented around the automobile, resulting in daily activities and destinations that are far apart and segregated into single-use areas that are connected by major roads and parking lots. Current trends indicate a strong association among land use, automobile dependency, level of routine physical activity, and the health of Americans. The following section summarizes information and challenges related to community design and land use. It also includes guiding questions for an assessment process and suggested methods for collecting information.

Urban sprawl has been defined as when "the spread of development across the landscape far outpaces population growth" (Ewing, Pendall, & Chen, 2002). Sprawl can be characterized by land use patterns, such as below average residential density; limited mixing within neighborhoods of residential homes, services, and jobs; a poorly connected street network; and areas where downtowns and city centers are not focal points. A national study of 448 metropolitan counties found that people living in sprawling, low-density counties walk less, weigh more and are more likely to be obese or have hypertension than people living in counties that are more compact (Ewing, Meakins, Hamidi, & Nelson, 2014).

Land use patterns that are more supportive of physical activity are vital to motivate larger numbers of people to adopt more active lifestyles. Policy strategies to encourage supportive land use patterns include establishing or expanding active living awards programs for developers; designers and local governments that demonstrate good practices; increasing programming improvements to local parks, trails, and greenways to encourage use; and updating zoning ordinances, building codes, and approval processes to encourage compact community design and a tighter mixture of activities. Additionally, the creation of regular programs to attract people to the town center and the enactment of ordinances,

codes and other policies that encourage owners to build on vacant lots and revitalize vacant properties can contribute to land use patterns that promote physical activity.

Proximity and Destination Diversity

Trends toward a more dispersed and segregated landscape reinforce a growing automobile dependency that reduces opportunities for regular physical activity during daily activities. Most communities are designed to favor one mode of travel – the automobile. Evidence is mounting that automobile-oriented land use policies reduce transportation choice, adversely affect air quality and safety, and discourage physical activity. Routine physical activity is necessary to prevent premature death, unnecessary illness and disability, enhance physical and mental health, and help maintain a high quality of life for everyone. Forty-three percent of people with safe places to walk within ten minutes of home met recommended activity levels, while just 27% of those without safe places to walk were active enough to benefit their health (Powell, Martin, & Chowdhury, 2003). However, schools, shopping centers and other places of interest are often built only for convenient access by cars, which can keep people from safely walking or biking, around town. Even after arriving at a destination by car, segregated land use patterns can continue an individual's automobile dependency.

Ewing, R., Pendall, R., & Chen, D. (2002). *Measuring Sprawl and Its Impacts. Smart Growth America report.* Smart Growth America, Washington, DC. Retrieved from: https://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/app/legacy/documents/MeasuringSprawl.PDF

Ewing, R., Meakins, G., Hamidi, S., & Nelson, A. C. (2014). Relationship between Urban Sprawl and Physical Activity, Obesity, and Morbidity–Update and Refinement. *Health & Place, 26,* 118-126.

Powell, K.E., Martin, L., & Chowdhury, P.P. (2003). Places to walk: convenience and regular physical activity. *American Journal of Public Health, 93(*9) 1519-1521.

People are more likely to commute to work on foot or via bicycle if they live in a city center, live close to a non-residential building, live very close to a grocery store or drug store, and have good access to public transportation (Atash, 1994; McCormack, Giles-Corti, & Bulsara, 2008; Nagel, Carlson, Bosworth, & Michael, 2008). A national household travel survey analysis of short trips shows that half of all trips are three miles or less, but fewer than 2 percent of those trips are made by bicycle, while 72 percent of them are driven (https://www.bikeleague.org). A more compact and mixed land use pattern that offers shorter distances to interesting destinations with pedestrian-friendly design features would encourage walking and biking, remove barriers to activity for everyone, and make healthy levels of physical activity attainable for large numbers of people as part of their daily routines.

Policy strategies to encourage dense development include promoting and constructing higher density, affordable and mixed-use projects near schools, parks, transit lines, work sites and commercial centers; updating road policies and standards and parking requirements and fees to improve connectivity, safety, and street design; and supporting incentives for transit and non-motorized transportation. Additionally, advocacy for updates to zoning ordinances, building codes, and approval processes to encourage compact community design and a tighter mixture of activities are also possible policy strategies.

Nagel, C. L., Carlson, N. E., Bosworth, M., & Michael, Y. L. (2008). The Relation between Neighborhood Built Environment and Walking Activity among Older Adults. American Journal of Epidemiology, 168(4), 461-468.

McCormack, G. R., Giles-Corti, B., & Bulsara, M. (2008). The Relationship between Destination Proximity, Destination Mix and Physical Activity Behaviors. Preventive Medicine, 46(1), 33-40.

Atash, F. (1994). Redesigning Suburbia for Walking and Transit: Emerging Concepts. Journal of Urban Planning and Development, 120(1), 48-57.

Systems and Policies

1. **How current and supportive of active transportation and recreation are the community's general or comprehensive plans, land use plans and development design guidelines?**

2. **What policies or procedures does local government have in place to:**

   - Bring destinations and activities close together? (e.g. zoning for increased residential and employment density and greater mix of uses, establishment or reinforcement of "activity centers" such as main streets and downtowns, form-based codes, etc.)

   - Concentrate new development closer to existing activities and infrastructure? (e.g. infill development, redevelopment, brownfield and greyfield development, adaptive reuse of buildings, historic preservation, etc.)

   - Site schools close enough to where students live and connected by safe routes to make walking, biking and other active forms of transportation to school possible?

   - Ensure that quality parks, trails, greenways and natural open spaces are close enough to where families live and connected by safe routes to encourage their routine use?

   - Centrally locate and safely connect public facilities and high traffic destinations (e.g. post offices, libraries, food markets, government offices, community centers, etc.) so they are convenient and accessible by walking and biking?

Systems and Policies Continued

- Promote clean, green and beautiful outdoor surroundings, free of environmental hazards or nuisances that encourage routine outdoor activity? (e.g. supports for urban forestry, landscaping, public art, graffiti and trash abatement, prohibitions on illegal dumping, polluting land uses, limits on noise and odors, water quality protections, lead abatement, etc.)

- Ensure an affordable mix of housing and business types so low-income families have equitable access to community assets, activities and routine opportunities for physical activity?

- Support equitable access among neighborhoods and population groups (e.g. communities of color, low-income children, elderly, people with disabilities) to public assets, healthy activities and routine opportunities for physical activity and equitable distribution of unwanted land uses. Are there geographic patterns related to the distribution of desirable and undesirable land uses and facilities? Why?

- Ensure that buildings and streets are designed at a human scale and oriented to pedestrians and cyclists? (e.g. buildings oriented to streets, minimal setbacks, attractive facades, signs and streetscapes, etc.)

- Encourage building and indoor space designs that support routine physical activities? (e.g. prominent, well lit and decorated stairwells, locker and shower facilities, fitness facilities, etc.)

- Encourage a variety of public spaces that promote interaction? (e.g. active playgrounds, gardens, plazas, farmers markets, walkways, etc.)

- Design and maintain public spaces, including streets, for vitality and increased use? (e.g. variety of activities and users, quality of access and connections, sociability, comfort and safety, well managed and maintained)

- Promote transit-oriented development with high quality access and environments for pedestrians and cyclists?

- Promote safe design in all kinds of locations and facilities (e.g. visibility, lighting, natural surveillance, emergency telephones, etc.) and other supports for public safety? (e.g. uniformed police or security, crossing guards, hospitality patrols, etc.)

- Minimize parking requirements for new development or eliminating parking subsidies where walking, biking and public transit are feasible forms of transportation? (e.g. parking maximums instead of minimums, charging for parking, shared parking, unbundled parking, etc.)

2. **How could all of the above-mentioned policies and procedures be improved and applied more equitably?**

3. **If the community design/ transportation system is unable to answer any of the assessment questions, what new capacities need to be built within the system to develop this knowledge and help ensure and promote land use patterns that are supportive for physical activity?**

Community/Partner Preferences

1. **How important do community stakeholders (including parents and children) consider the following issues:**

   - Updated and integrated land use planning, development and design guidelines

   - Clustered destinations and activities

   - Infill and redevelopment around existing assets

   - School siting and safe routes to school near where students live

   - Centrally located and safely connected parks, trails, greenways and natural spaces

   - Centrally located and safely connected public facilities and high traffic destinations

   - Clean, green and beautiful outdoor surroundings, free of environmental hazards or nuisances

   - Affordable mix of housing and business types

   - Equitable access to healthy, desirable activities and land uses

   - Equitable distribution of unwanted land uses

Community/Partner Preferences Continued

- Human scale buildings and streets

- Building and interior design for activity

- Variety and quality of public spaces that encourage interaction

- Transit-oriented development

- Safe design

- Parking management and reduction

2. Where the above items are considered missing or inadequate, why do stakeholders think this is the case?

3. Which of the above items are most consistently identified as a priority for community stakeholders?

Built Environment

1. **Are routine destinations and potential activities for most families clustered closely enough to make them quickly accessible and convenient by walking, biking or transit? Are grocery stores, farmers markets or other major retail food outlets within quick and convenient walking or biking distance to where most people live? (15 minutes is sometimes used as a time benchmark; in addition, three-quarters mile for walking and three miles for cycling are potential distance measures)**

2. **Are quality parks, trails, greenways and natural areas within quick and convenient walking or biking distance to where most people live? Are significant employment and shopping areas quick and convenient walking or biking distance to where most people live? Are public and civic destinations quick and convenient walking or biking distance to where most people live? Which ones are not close and safe, and what is the impact? Are the connections to routine destinations safe?**

3. **Which community design features are most consistently inadequate or counterproductive for active living across low-income communities and throughout the city?**

4. **What opportunities exist for redevelopment of vacant and underused land or buildings close to existing activities?**

5. **What percentage of students live within one-half mile of their school? How does this differ between neighborhoods and schools? What physical opportunities exist to retain or build schools close to neighborhoods? What are the physical and design-oriented barriers to safe routes to school?**

6. **To what extent is the overall outdoor aesthetic of the community clean, green, beautiful and free of environmental hazards or nuisances? Where is this not true? What geographic patterns exist between neighborhoods? What significant or high traffic areas need improvement the most? What kinds of features are most in need of improvement or would make the most impact? (e.g., building facades, streets, parks, schools, commercial center, etc.)**

7. **Do low-income families and communities of color have equitable access to healthy, desirable activities and land uses? What neighborhoods have the least access to a variety of desirable activities and land uses? Which desirable land uses and activities are least accessible for disadvantaged groups? What undesirable land uses (or planned land uses) exist in disadvantaged communities, and what physical opportunities exist to find more equitable sites?**

8. **To what extent are buildings and streetscapes oriented to pedestrians and cyclists and to opportunities for routine activity? (e.g., entrances facing the street (not parking lot); human scale signs, windows, prominent and attractive staircases, shower facilities, etc.) Where is this not true? What buildings or streetscapes need the most improvement? Which would have the highest impact?**

9. To what extent is there a variety of quality public spaces to meet the needs of all residents in the community and encourage interaction between them? What about these spaces needs improvement, and what improvements would have the highest impact on their regular use?

10. If the community and its primary travel corridors are compact and densely populated enough to support transit service, how can the neighborhoods, buildings and streets within one-half mile of transit stops be improved to make transit convenient for more people and more pedestrian and bicycle friendly?

11. How could major destinations, centers of activity and routes in the community be better designed with features that promote increased safety from crime and injury? (e.g., visibility, lighting, natural surveillance, emergency telephones, surface materials, signage, uniformed safety personnel, etc.) Which of these locations needs the most improvement? Which would have the highest impact?

12. In key centers of activity, how much land is devoted to parking?Does parking interrupt the ground floor street frontage, adversely affect the beauty of the street, dominate the landscape, or otherwise create barriers to destinations or disincentives for pedestrians and cyclists?

13. In cases where the above-mentioned community design features are inadequate or counterproductive for active living, how could they be improved?

Methods for Assessing Community Design/ Land Use Fitness Environments

	Purpose	What	Who
Systems and Policies	Identify land use system barriers and policy opportunities	**Stakeholder interviews of:** city planners, transportation engineers, public works staff, transit officials, pedestrian advocates, elected officials, other community leaders. **Policy document analysis of:** comprehensive land use plans, parks, recreation, greenway, and trail master plans and joint-use facility agreements, transportation master plans, pedestrian and/or bicycle plans, capital funding processes/priorities, street design standards, subdivision ordinances.	Partners, transportation and planning consultants, potentially student interns
Community and Partner Preferences	Determine barriers and preferences for community design and land use	**Focus groups of** citizens, including older adults, people with disabilities and low income; **Information gathering at** neighborhood meetings; **Intercept interviews of** people walking and bicycling, at local retail destinations, or at high traffic destinations (e.g. post offices, libraries, government offices, community centers, etc.); **Surveys** of citizens' travel and destinationchoices.	Partners, parents, volunteers, student interns
Built Environment	Assess safety, distance, and amenability for active transportation and transit between residential areas and retail, employment centers, and recreation facilities	**Walking and biking audits** of of neighborhoods, retail and commercial areas, streets, intersections and transit stops. **GIS data** from local government and/or regional transporation authority.	Partners, parents, volunteers, student interns, transportation and planning consultants

Module 6

ASSESSING THE FOOD SYSTEM: PRODUCING

6 Assessing the Food System: Producing

A community food system assessment is an important step in the process of developing an action plan for change in the food system. It includes the who, what, where, when , why and how of our food – from farm to fork. There are many comprehensive tools available to guide a food system assessment and many indicators that can be considered. This document synthesizes many of these indicators/tools and attempts to provide suggestions for minimizing the data collection required while maximizing the usefulness of the data collected. In order to avoid gathering data that will not be useful, it is important to consider how your vision will inform the food system assessment as well as where the food system assessment fits in the process of moving from a vision to an action plan.

This planning series includes two domains: Producing and Eating.

Key Issues Related to Producing

What is being produced in your region is a very critical component of your local food system. Obviously local food will not be available without local production. Local production includes both farming vegetable and fruit crops and raising livestock and can vary in scale from urban community gardens to family-owned market farms to commercial agricultural production. Fisheries and dairies are also part of local food production.

A useful starting point in assessing production is to simply take inventory of how many farms/gardens of these different types and scales exist in your locale of interest. Knowing what these farms and gardens produce and how and to whom the food is sold is the next issue to consider. In assessing the availability of local and healthy food production, one key thing to note is the extent to which farmers are selling at markets. This will indicate the extent to which healthy, fresh food is entering the local food system. If farmers in the area are selling to wholesalers for processing, there is potentially an opportunity to divert some of this supply into expanded direct marketing of produce grown for fresh consumption.

As you consider the location of the different types and scales of farms and gardens, think about where these are located relative to neighborhoods with high poverty rates. Are there community gardens accessible to everyone in the city? Are the Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in the area accessible to diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups?

Another important consideration in regards to food production is the stability of your local agricultural base. Assessing the extent of educational opportunities and/or programmatic support for new and emerging farmers and gardeners is one entry point into understanding the continued availability of a local food supply. Educational opportunities could also include the extent of school-based gardening programs, which expose children to the possibilities of growing and consuming healthy, fresh produce.

Key Questions Related to Producing

1. **How many community gardens, CSAs and farms are there in your locale of interest?**

2. **What type of farms and gardens are these? What are they producing and to whom are they selling what they produce?**

3. **Where are these farms and gardens located relative to populations with limited access to fresh foods?**

4. **Are there education programs available for potential farmers and gardeners that increase opportunities for healthy food self-provisioning and/or expanded availability of fresh food in your locale of interest?**

Methods for Assessing Producing

Most of the key questions related to food production can be addressed by either accessing national databases or by calling state level agencies. If your community wishes to get first hand perspectives on any of these topics, however, you may wish to conduct a focus group. A guide to hosting a focus group around local food production questions is included under primary data in the last table.

Secondary Data

Number, type, and location of: community gardens, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) producer's and farms

Indicator	Data Source	Data Scale
Existing Data Sets		
Number, Type, and Production of Farms	USDA Census of Agriculture *https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/*	County & State
List of Local Farms	Eat Well Guide *https://www.eatwellguide.org/*	Zip Code
List of Community Gardens	American Community Garden Association *https://communitygarden.org/*	Zip Code, City, State
List of Community Supported Agriculture Producers	Local Harvest *https://www.localharvest.org/csa/*	Zip Code, City, State
List of Local Food Databases/Directories	National Sustainabile Agriculture Information Service *https://attra.ncat.org/*	State
Agencies to Call		
Organic Farms	State Department of Agriculture	Varies
Pasture-Based Animal Farms	Land Grant University; County Extension Office	State or County
Farms using Integrated Pest Management		

Secondary Data

Education programs for gardeners and farmers

Indicator	Data Source	Data Scale
Agencies to Call		
Garden/Farm Education	County Extension Office	Varies
	Local Community Garden Non-Profit	Varies

Primary Data

Data Collection Tools for Food Production

Purpose	What	Who
Assess political and economic support for local food producers, market opportunities for local food producers	Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit *https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=43179* (See Appendix B-6)	Partners, Volunteers, Student Interns

Module 7

ASSESSING THE FOOD SYSTEM: EATING

Key Issues Related to Eating

pg. 60

Key Questions Related to Eating

pg. 61

Methods for Assessing Eating

pg. 62

7 Assessing the Food System: Eating

A community food system assessment is an important step in the process of developing an action plan for change in the food system. It includes the who, what, where, when , why and how of our food – from farm to fork. There are many comprehensive tools available to guide a food system assessment and many indicators that can be considered. This document synthesizes many of these indicators/tools and attempts to provide suggestions for minimizing the data collection required while maximizing the usefulness of the data collected. In order to avoid gathering data that will not be useful, it is important to consider how your vision will inform the food system assessment as well as where the food system assessment fits in the process of moving from a vision to an action plan.

This planning series includes two domains: Producing and Eating.

Key Issues Related to Eating

The quality and quantity of available food resources play a part in achieving a *healthy* diet. A common way to define a healthy diet is whether it meets the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines (https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/dietary-guidelines). In addition, freshness and variety play a role in nutritional quality, especially where fruits and vegetables are concerned. Production practices such as pesticide and antibiotic use can also be included in your assessment if these are a concern for your community.

To measure *affordability* of a nutritious and balanced weekly menu, the USDA has created the *Thrifty Food Plan* (https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodPlansCostofFood). The *Thrifty Food Plan* shopping list contains one food item of each of eight food groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, meat/meat alternatives, sugars and sweets, fats and oils, and condiments.

Lower income populations tend to experience more barriers to food accessibility in general. These can include type and location of food stores and restaurants, and transportation issues. Public transportation and walkability as related geographically to neighborhoods and food retailers are very important here.

Each community has its own unique capacity for producing local food, but price, quantity and seasonality are common concerns for equitable access to these foods.

☁ **Key Questions Related to Eating**

1. **What would a socio-economic and demographic profile of the community look like?**

2. **What do the dietary patterns in the community look like (food intake and/or dollars spent)?**

3. **What is the level of household food security?**

4. **What is the level of usage of emergency food providers?**

5. **What is the prevalence of diet-related disease?**

6. **What is the extent of nutrition education resources available?**

Methods for Assessing Eating

Secondary Data

① Socio-Economic & Demographic Profile

Indicator	Data Source	Data Scale
Existing Data Sets		
Demographics	US Census Factfinder *https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/*	City
	Bureau of Labor Statistics *https://www.bls.gov/*	Varies
Food Stamp and WIC Paricipation	USDA Food and Nutrition Service Program Data *https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/overview*	State/Region
Various Statistics	Federal Agency Statistics *https://nces.ed.gov/partners/fedstat.asp*	Varies

② Nutrition Education Resources

Indicator	Data Source	Data Scale
Existing Data Sets		
Existing Programs	CDC School Health Profiles *https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/profiles/index.htm*	State
	The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools *http://www.healthinschools.org/*	State
Agencies to Call		
Food Stamp and Nutrition Education Programs	County Extension, School District Wellness Coordinator, Food Banks, Secondary Education Institutions	Local

③ Dietary Patterns
(Food Intake and/or Dollars Spent)

Indicator	Data Source	Data Scale
Existing Data Sets		
Food and Nutrient Intake	USDA Nutrient Intake Data *https://www.ars.usda.gov/northeast-area/beltsville-md-bhnrc/beltsville-human-nutrition-research-center/nutrient-data-laboratory/*	Per Capita
	USDA Economic Research Service *https://www.ers.usda.gov/*	State/Region
Food Availability Data	USDA Economic Research Service *https://www.ers.usda.gov/*	Varies
Youth Fruit and Vegetable Intake	CDC Youth Risk Behavior Data *https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm*	State
Food Expenditures	Bureau of Labor Statistics *https://www.bls.gov/*	State/Region

④ Prevalence of Diet-Related Disease

Indicator	Data Source	Data Scale
Existing Data Sets		
Children's Health Trends	CDC School Health Profiles *https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/profiles/index.htm*	City
	The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools *http://www.healthinschools.org/*	City
Health Trends	CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Data *https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/index.html*	State/Region
Agencies to Call		
	Local Health Department	

(5) Household Food Security

Indicator	Data Source	Data Scale
Existing Data Sets		
Household Food Security	USDA Food Security Report *https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/-food-nutrition-assistance/-food-security-in-the-us/*	State

Primary Data

Data Collection Tools for Eating

Purpose	What	Who
Assess Youth Fruit and Vegetable Intake	Community-level surveys	Youth - Self Reporting
Assess Adult Fruit and Vegetable Intake	Community-level surveys	Adults - Self Reporting
Assess Fruits and Vegetables in the Home	Community-level surveys	Adults - Self Reporting
Assess Household Food Security	Survey Modules: English & Spanish *https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/survey-tools/https://www.localharvest.org/csa/*	Volunteers, Organizations, Students
	Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit *https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=43179* (See Appendix B-3)	Volunteers, Organizations, Students