

Active Living Ramsey County

Section G

Introduction

The Active Living Ramsey County (ALRC) partnership works to bring about and sustain changes in design, transportation, and public/private policies to cultivate and support a way of life that makes physical activity in our neighborhoods and communities safer and easier. ALRC is a collaborative effort—not a “county” project—initiated in the spring of 2005, with the support of community and business leaders, elected officials and representatives from organizations like cities, the county, schools, and residents from all walks of life.

Active Living Ramsey County Strategic Plan 2008 – 2012

In the summer of 2007 ALRC began a strategic planning process to assist in clearly identifying the direction of the partnership. The group reviewed accomplishments and successes influenced by the partnership and then identified and established goals and strategies to keep the initiative moving forward. Overall, there was an overwhelming response from the group that the ALRC partnership is valuable and should be continued. The information below details the strategic effort the partnership identified for continuing its work over the next five years—from 2008 – 2012.

On August 8, 2008, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners adopted the Active Living Ramsey County Strategic Plan 2008—2012 and authorized the integration of the Active Living principles into the work of County departments (*Resolution # 2008-251*).

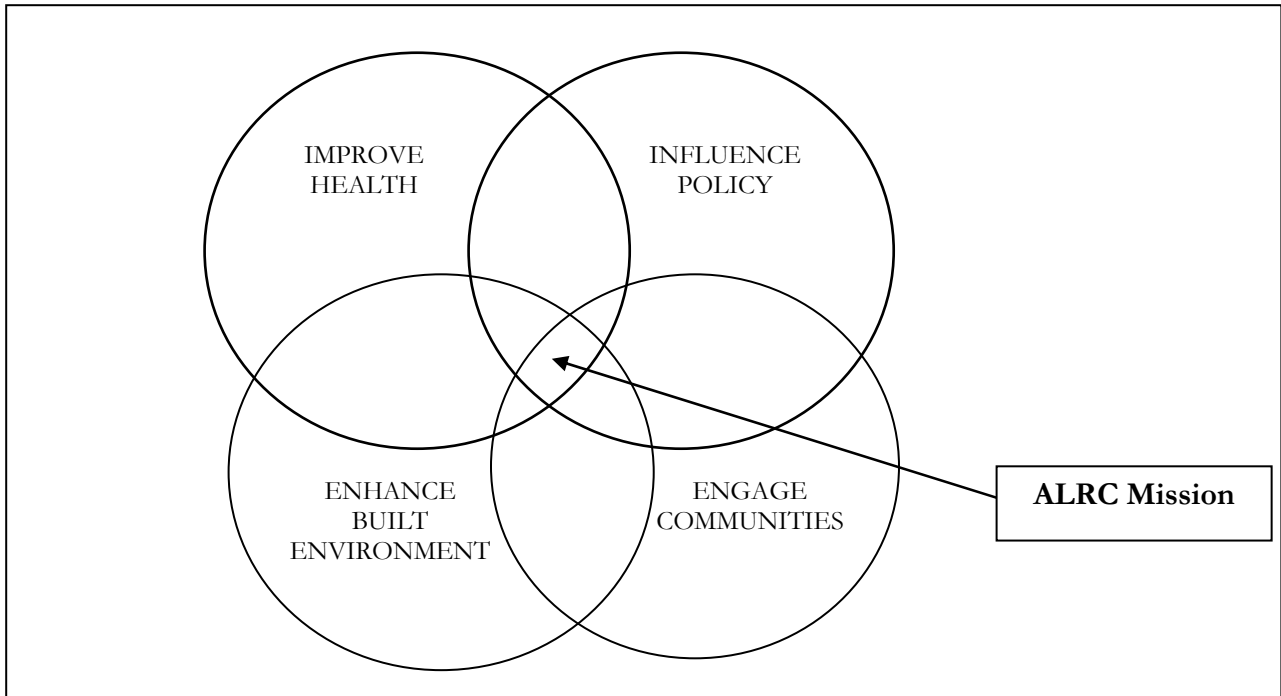
Mission and Goals

The ALRC Mission is “*To create and promote environments that make it safe and convenient for people to integrate physical activity into their daily routines.*”

The goals ALRC has identified fall into four overlapping themes:

- 1) Improve Health
- 2) Influence Policy
- 3) Enhance Built Environment
- 4) Engage Communities.

After identifying goals within the themes it became evident there is some overlap in the strategies in realizing and achieving these goals.



Based on the ALRC mission statement the following goals were identified for the partnership:

1) Improve Health

- a. Increase the proportion of adults who engage in leisure time physical activity.
- b. Increase the proportion of trips made by walking.
- c. Increase the proportion of trips made by bicycling.
- d. Increase the number of education for leisure programs conducted throughout Ramsey County communities.

2) Influence Policy

- a. Support and encourage policies that integrate active living principles into comprehensive planning, ordinances, and zoning codes.
- b. Identify and reduce barriers to active living through policy influence.
- c. Identify and work to reduce health disparities in physical activity in target populations

3) Enhance Built Environment

- a. Promote the Pedestrian/Bicycle System (PBS) in new construction and reconstruction projects to increase connectivity, accessibility, and safety.
- b. Encourage a comprehensive multi-modal transportation system in Ramsey County.

- c. Identify and reduce barriers to active living through physical projects.
- 4) Engage Communities
- a. Increase and maintain engagement in partnership internal operations.
 - b. Increase and maintain resident engagement in ALRC activities and projects.

Increasing daily physical activity is the focus of the ALRC partnership, which is associated with numerous health benefits. The partnership acknowledged that striving to accomplish the aforementioned goals might have other unintentional benefits. Improving the health of Ramsey County residents through increased physical activity will further take steps toward eliminating health disparities, reducing the proportion of pedestrian and bicycle accidents, reducing the proportion of children, adolescents, and adults that are overweight and obese, decreasing risk of chronic diseases associated with physical inactivity, and reducing the proportion of people with disabilities reporting environmental barriers. Further, focusing on physical infrastructure and policy is inclusive of physical activity for health, recreation, leisure, and transportation through a variety of approaches including parks and open space, transportation and land use. This also supports and relates to the partnership’s first theme—improve health. The partnership acknowledged that strategies for the physical infrastructure and policy goals might facilitate and support an environment that makes regular physical activity more realistic and feasible. Lastly, engaging communities is critical to realizing the goals identified within all the other themes to improve health, influence policy, and enhance the built environment.

Priority Strategies

After goals were adopted, strategies and action steps were identified for each. It became apparent that many of the strategies identified overlap and relate with multiple goals. This became the basis for prioritizing strategies.

- 1) Sustain leadership at local and county levels
- 2) Identify and reduce gaps in the Pedestrian/Bicycle System
 - Develop an county-wide ALRC Bicycle Committee
 - Conduct Walkable Community Workshops
 - Support and strengthen the work of the Ramsey County GIS user group
- 3) Support and encourage Physical Activity Projects/Programming in Ramsey County
 - Provide a network for sharing evidence-based and best practices information

- Collaborate and provide technical assistance to municipalities, schools, etc. in applying for funding—e.g. MnDOT’s Safe Routes to School, Transit for Livable Communities where active living principles add value and strengthen proposals
- Create an Active Living Recognition Program
- Collaborate with municipalities on implementation of Health Impact Assessments
- Sponsor the Pathways to Health 1000 Benches Project
- Provide tools for implementation of evidence-based physical activity interventions

These strategies were selected because of their appearance under multiple goals and their ability to overlap with all four themes. The strategies reflect how engaging communities can result in physical infrastructure changes to promote and encourage physical activity. In order for the above strategies to be realized, the partnership needs to focus on sustaining leadership at local and county levels. Sustaining leadership is integral to progressing with the other strategies.

1. Sustain Leadership at Local and County levels

Sustaining leadership within ALRC is critical for the success of the multi-disciplinary partnership. Without strong leadership and collaboration ALRC will struggle to make progress toward realizing its established goals. The investment of resources to achieve this priority include the time and energy of currently engaged ALRC members—including those within Ramsey County Departments, such as Parks and Recreation, Public Health, Public Safety, Public Works and Regional Rail. Partners **must** extend beyond County departments and include cities, schools, health plans, non-governmental organizations, residents, and elected officials. In order to increase and maintain interest in ALRC activities, partnership meetings need to be purposeful and provide added value to the work stakeholders are doing. A project coordinator for ALRC who can facilitate, oversee and organize the efforts of the partnership will be needed.

Activities that will increase and maintain engagement in the partnership include:

- a. Reconnect with the existing partnership list
- b. Identify potential partners not currently at the table
- c. Identify missing geographic areas
- d. Involve current partners (through Parks and Recreation, Public Health, and Public Works) in promoting the partnership to others
- e. Recommend and translate effective intervention strategies to partners and other constituents

There are numerous measures that may assist in defining how well the partnership is engaging stakeholders through the aforementioned activities. The partnership can monitor:

- Number of stakeholders
- Proportion of actively engaged stakeholders
- Number of participants attending quarterly
- ALRC partnership meetings
- Number of hits on ALRC webpages
- Conduct a follow-up Ramsey County Active Communities Study of residents to track progress from 2005 survey with Decision Resources, Ltd.

Through increasing and maintaining engagement in the partnership's internal operations, activities and projects, ALRC will realize increased information sharing through a variety of mediums, including email, website, county newsletters, local newspapers, city newsletters, and district council newsletters. Sharing best practices and evidence-based information can assist in building capacity and increasing outreach for ALRC. Through increased capacity and outreach, change may be seen in knowledge, attitudes, and awareness of ALRC stakeholders.

Changes seen in knowledge, attitudes, and awareness continually increase capacity and allow ALRC to actively engage stakeholders within defined roles. Defined roles of engaged stakeholders may include:

- **Implementers:** those involved with program operations
- **Partners:** those who actively support projects
- **Participants:** those served or affected by the programs
- **Decision makers:** those in a position to do or decide something about the program

Having clearly defined stakeholders enables ALRC to continually plan for the sustainability of partner engagement and to make progress toward identified goals of improving health, physical infrastructure, and policies. ALRC should identify the implementers and decision makers, which could set apart a steering committee for the partnership. Sustaining leadership and establishing a steering committee at local and county levels address goal 4.1—to increase and maintain engagement in partnership internal operations—and positions ALRC to better achieve goal 4.2—to increase and maintain resident engagement in ALRC activities and projects. This lends to realizing the goals identified to improve health and changes to physical infrastructure and policy. *ALRC goals directly impacted: 4.1, 4.2*

2. Identify Gaps In The Pedestrian/Bicycle System

Identifying gaps in the Pedestrian/Bicycle System (PBS) seeks to realize the goals of ALRC through increasing connectivity and accessibility to support and encourage active transportation as well as leisure-time physical activity. In order for this strategy to be effective, ALRC must continually call upon the resources that partners and stakeholders are able to invest. It is necessary to continue with a multi-disciplinary approach to ensure a thorough and rigorous approach is taken to identify current connections as well as gaps within the PBS in Ramsey County.

There are a variety of approaches ALRC can take in achieving this priority. The following approaches were mentioned throughout the strategic planning process:

- Develop a county-wide Active Living Ramsey County Bicycle Committee
- Conduct *Walkable Community Workshops*
- Support and strengthen the work of the Ramsey County GIS user group

Active Living Ramsey County Bicycle Committee: ALRC will collaborate with municipalities and Ramsey County Departments to support and encourage a county-wide ALRC Bicycle Committee. Each municipality can help recommend 1 or 2 residents who are bicyclists for transportation and/or recreation to volunteer for this effort. Representatives may assist in developing an ALRC Bicycle System Plan. An Active Living Ramsey County Bicycle Plan could help assess current bicycling infrastructure, identify gaps and priority areas to ensure a comprehensive, complete, and connected bikeway system throughout Ramsey County and its municipalities. An ALRC Bicycle Committee would operate with input from the Ramsey County Board, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Public Safety, Public Health, and municipalities. *ALRC goals directly impacted: 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2*

Walkable Community Workshops: *Walkable Community Workshops* further reinforce and maintain community engagement. ALRC can coordinate and facilitate *Walkable Community Workshops* within Ramsey County. A small group of ALRC partners have participated in a train-the-trainer session with the Minnesota Department of Health on how to conduct these workshops. *Walkable Community Workshops* may also provide a tangible approach for municipalities to identify and prioritize how to transform their community into a more walkable area, which may be accordance with changes made to their comprehensive plans, ordinances, and zoning codes to promote and support active living principles. *Walkable Community Workshops* can identify pedestrian and bicycle improvements to be prioritized and implemented. *ALRC goals directly impacted: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2*

Ramsey County GIS User Group: To further identify gaps within the PBS, ALRC will continue to support and strengthen the work of the Ramsey County GIS User Group. The GIS User Group can help to promote the current PBS and further identify areas in need of improvement. ALRC and the GIS User Group may explore how the aforementioned strategies (*Walkable Community Workshops*)

and an Active Living Ramsey County Bicycle Committee) may assist in the collection of data on where there is incomplete infrastructure and the attributes of the surrounding infrastructure. ALRC should consider how it could best partner and collaborate with the GIS User Group to reduce the gaps in the PBS and provide a continuous system.

ALRC can utilize a variety of outputs to measure its progress toward increasing connectivity and accessibility of PBS in Ramsey County. The partnership can track the number of *Walkable Community Workshops* and the number of Bicycle Advisory Committee meetings held. ALRC can work with partners to assess the current known number of miles in the Pedestrian Bicycle System and the increase in miles. ALRC can work together with communities to inventory the number of trip-end facilities (e.g. bicycle parking, showers, lockers) available and where additional trip-end facilities are feasible and needed. Additionally, ALRC can track the number of Ramsey County residents that are walking and bicycling for leisure and/or transportation and follow-up with the 2005 Decision Resources Study.

Through the intended activities to assist in identifying gaps within the Pedestrian/Bicycle System ALRC will realize further information sharing and continued partnership with municipalities and Ramsey County Departments. Also, the work toward identifying gaps in the PBS will further increase awareness and knowledge on the connection between active living and the built environment. *ALRC goals directly impacted: 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2*

3. Support And Encourage Physical Activity Projects/Programming

Supporting and encouraging physical activity projects and programming throughout the County enables ALRC to engage stakeholders and partners. Evidence-based projects and programming ensure a comprehensive approach to promoting physical activity. In order to successfully promote physical activity not only do policies and the physical infrastructure need to support it, but there needs to be programming and education on its accessibility and benefits. Activities supporting and encouraging physical activity, including:

- Provide technical assistance and support
- Assist in implementation of Health Impact Assessments
- Create an Active Living Recognition Program
- Sponsor the Pathways to Health 1000 Benches Project
- Provide tools for implementation of evidence-based physical activity interventions

Provide Technical Assistance: ALRC can continually assist in coordinating local efforts within community organizations to change the local environment to increase access to physical activity. The partnership can assist municipalities in

educating key stakeholders to influence and affect policy and environmental changes. ALRC will work with organizations to leverage, combine, and capitalize on complementary strengths and resources to promote changes in the built environment. Other areas in which ALRC can provide technical assistance include:

- Engaging non-traditional partners to comprehensively promote physical activity at multiple levels and settings and in a variety of populations
- Providing support and endorsement of collaborative efforts
- Using data as a tool to develop and prioritize community-based interventions or policies that promote physical activity
- Summarizing data to highlight ethical, political, social, and economic issues related to physical activity and health disparities
- Using analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to assist with evaluation of unmet needs
- Recommending and translating effective intervention strategies to partners and other interested community organizations
- Address cultural, social, and behavioral factors that contribute to physical inactivity and disease progression and health promoting behaviors in target populations, including: girls and women, older adults, people of color and American Indians, people with disabilities, and people with lower income and less education.

Municipal planners further identified items they would like to receive further assistance on, including: (1) providing a forum with interjurisdictional collaboration between municipalities, county, and state, (2) coordinating day trips for elected officials to better understand mixed-use/active living environments that work well, and (3) provide information on historical perspective of planning in the pre-automobile era and what historic corridors/main streets looked like for mixed use examples. ALRC will explore how future collaboration may occur and be beneficial to municipalities—particularly in regards to how community design may influence health and promote physical activity. Assistance provided to partners will be evidence-based and utilize data from the Ramsey County Active Communities Study, Metropolitan Design Center—Twin Cities Walking Study, Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Student Survey, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, American Time Use Survey, etc..

ALRC goals directly impacted: 1.1-4, 2.1-3, 3.1-3, 4.1-2

Health Impact Assessments: Health Impact Assessments (HIA) are generally defined as a “collection of procedures and tools by which projects, policies, and programs can be evaluated based on their potential effects on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population.” Health Impact Assessments can help decision-makers understand the health consequences of projects and policies they are considering. ALRC can provide

assistance to municipalities throughout the five steps of completing a Health Impact Assessment. These steps—as outlined from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—include:

- **Screening:** identify projects or policies for which HIA would be useful
- **Scoping:** identify which health impacts should be included
- **Risk assessment:** identify which people may be affected and how they may be affected
- **Reporting:** present the results to decision-makers
- **Evaluation:** determine the effect of the HIA on the decision making process

Municipalities throughout Ramsey County are stretched for resources and time and working with ALRC to utilize the HIA tool can help plan for healthier communities throughout the County. *ALRC goals directly impacted: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2*

Active Living Recognition Program: ALRC should consider creating an Active Living Recognition Program. ALRC can develop criteria describing excellence in active living for communities. Recognition could be given for municipalities who adopt resolutions around active living principles. The recognition program would provide media and public awareness opportunities that could help change norms around controversial issues, i.e. sidewalks.

There are a few outputs ALRC could utilize to measure progress with this strategy. ALRC can track the number of funding applications for which technical assistance is provided and the number of applications funded. Tracking letters of support given by the partnership may be useful in measuring partnership outreach. ALRC may also look to the number of projects, programs, or policies that are recognized in the Active Living Recognition Program. Lastly, the partnership can assess the number of Health Impact Assessments completed throughout the County.

Through these efforts the partnership will continue to realize greater information sharing and continued relationships with municipalities, schools, county departments, and community organizations. ALRC will increase awareness and knowledge on the importance of promoting physical activity and healthy communities. Because of these undertakings, the ALRC partners hope to achieve an increase in access to resources and outside funding to attain active living goals. Also, Ramsey County municipalities will plan for healthier communities due to Health Impact Assessments. Overtime ALRC may find that communities recognize and value the partnership goals and the strategies used to achieve them and will further call on the partnership to assist in future endeavors. *ALRC goals directly impacted: 1.1-4, 2.1-3, 3.1-3, 4.1-2*

Sponsoring the Pathways to Health 1000 Benches Project: ALRC will facilitate the placement of 1,000 benches made of recycled materials in a series of corridors connecting destination throughout the County. The 1000 benches effort will create a physical environment to promote physical activity by facilitating “pathways to health,” that serve especially the elderly, people with disabilities and people with small children. Benches act as point of decision prompts and involve street-scale urban design and land use policies that support increased physical activity in small geographic areas. The 1000 Benches Project reflects how engaging communities can result in physical infrastructure changes to promote and encourage physical activity. The objectives of the 1000 Benches Project include accomplishing the following by the end of 2010:

- Place 1000 benches on corridors that connect destinations;
- Facilitate the creation of 50 – 100 different corridors, with 10 – 20 benches in each;
- Place benches throughout all geographic areas of Ramsey County

ALRC can monitor progress in the Pathways to Health 1000 Benches Project through a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures. These measures include:

- Number of inquiries received from communities
- Number of proposals received
- Number of benches installed over time
- Request feedback from communities/staff involved with bench installation
- Assess activity pre/post bench installation
- Survey identified destinations along corridors

The qualitative and quantitative measures will allow ALRC to assess the effectiveness of the 1000 Benches Project. *ALRC goals directly impacted: 1.1-3, 2.1-2, 3.3, 4.1-2*

Long-Term Outcomes

Through work toward its mission, ALRC will realize continual advocacy for policy and environmental change promoting physical activity. Over time, ALRC hopes to impact social norms that support both individual choices to become more active and community support for infrastructure that will help them do that safely and conveniently.