Summary

America Walks has worked tirelessly to try and reverse the devastating trend of pedestrian injuries and fatalities in the US each year. Through these efforts, the organization has learned the importance in creating change at the local level around a safe systems model. With this in mind, America Walks partnered with UNC-HSRC to pilot a program that offered twelve midsize cities training, resources, and a support system to help assess, plan, and prioritize effective and context-sensitive safety treatments, and to increase a community sense of urgency for safety and Safe Systems approaches. The program consisted of two main parts, online learning modules and the implementation of a community-specific safety plan. Each part included regular discussions and meetings with program staff and the cohort of participating communities.

The communities began the program by completing a baseline assessment to better understand where they stood with respect to safety trends and how their current programs, policies, and practices support a Safe Systems approach. They were also asked to examine broader community support and public engagement on the topic of pedestrian safety. This information served as the foundation for the future work they were going to be expected to complete and offered program staff an opportunity to assess potential challenges and opportunities within each individual community.

The first three months of the program consisted of five online learning modules, 1. Safe Systems, Collaboration, and Partnerships, 2. Assessing Safety and Equity, 3. Planning and designing Safer Communities, 4. Addressing Safety Problems, and 5. Institutionalizing Safe Systems. Communities also completed a “quick-win” activity, like participating in a Walk to School Day event or organizing a stakeholder meeting, and developed their community-specific safety plan that included a short-term project. Examples of projects include collection and analysis of crashes involving pedestrians and cyclists, pop-up and demonstration projects, hosting an event or events related to safety, the implementation of an educational program, and the development of a larger plan (e.g. Vision Zero).

During the second part of the program, we continued to meet online monthly to explore additional topics related to pedestrian safety and Safe Systems. The communities also implemented their short-term projects during this time. Examples of projects include a near-miss crash survey of cyclists and pedestrians conducted by the Knoxville team and a demonstration project in Anchorage. America Walks and UNC-HSRC periodically met with individual state teams to provide technical assistance on their projects.
All twelve of the original participating communities completed the program and four have elected to continue on with America Walks through its State Walking Networks program. This program will allow these communities to engage with each other as well as America Walks staff and other participants across the US to explore new topics and resources, share challenges and successes, and continue to work towards improved safety. The review of the experience and the final evaluation of the participating communities can be found below.

America Walks and UNC-HSRC saw great value in having the opportunity to develop and execute this new program. The training and curriculum will be continued to use by both organizations, separately and in partnership with one another, and both organizations plan to continue to identify opportunities to provide education and training around Safe Systems. Although the official grant period has wrapped, America Walks has identified several ways to use the successful case studies of the participating communities and the overall program in presentations to broader networks, published reports and case studies, and informing the discussions of the upcoming National Walking Summits. America Walks, with the support of UNC-HSRC, also plans to continue to refine and develop the curriculum to be used in other capacities.

End of Program Evaluation

America Walks and UNC-HSRC worked together to develop an evaluation and assessment for the end of the program that reflected previous evaluation and surveys taken of the participating communities and drew on the extensive assessment experience of both organizations. The end-of-program evaluation consisted of two parts, an exit interview and a written evaluation.

The written component included questions from the baseline and mid-term surveys, along with a few additional questions, to evaluate both community progress and program effectiveness. The exit interviews served as a supplement to the written evaluation in order to gain additional insights about the communities’ experiences.

General themes that emerged include:

- Enhanced coordination and technical skills needed to implement more evidence-based safe systems approaches. Communities commented on the value and quality of the material presented in the learning modules and monthly meetings.

- Incorporation of safe systems principles in planning and public conversations.

Examples include:
  - Chapel Hill’s Pedestrian Safety Action Plan
  - Watsonville’s Vision Zero Action Plan

- Increased cross-sector communication and collaboration and development of new partnerships.
Examples include:
  o The City of Richmond and VDOT, Department of Public Works, and BikeWalk RVA
  o The City of Knoxville and the Knox County Sheriff’s Office

- Increased national peer-sharing through America Walks webinars and written reports.

Examples include:
  o Walking the Road to Zero (guest blog)
  o What’s Next for Walkable Communities (webinar)
  o Beyond the Crash Report: Finding Additional Data on Pedestrian Crashes (guest blog)