

Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living

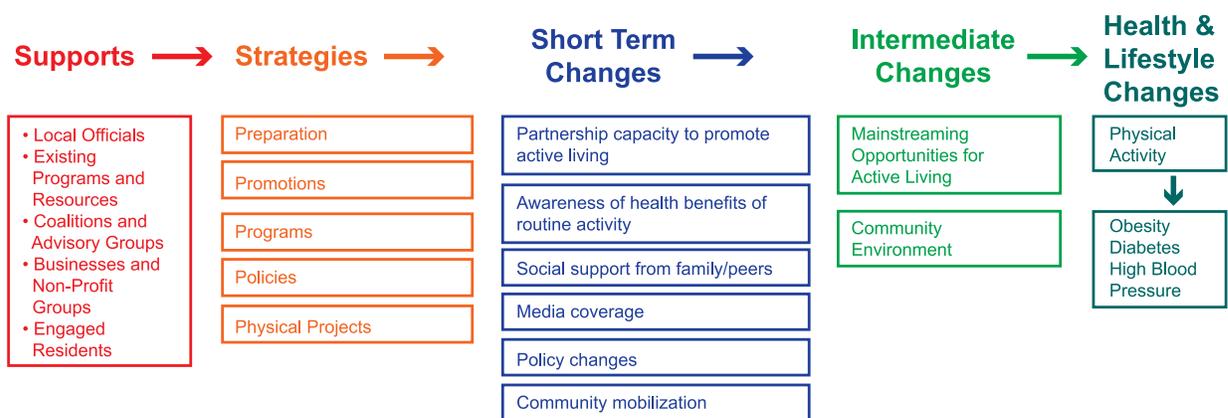
Evaluation of Active Living by Design | Albuquerque, New Mexico | 2003-2008

In 2002, a group of advocates, city planners, and health researchers developed a new vision for Albuquerque, New Mexico. In this vision, they desired enhanced connectivity between residential neighborhoods and commercial districts and an increase in neighborhood density and transit ridership. They imagined schools and neighborhoods with safe walking and biking environments. They envisioned residents moving through the city in healthier and more active ways. They identified a vehicle for achieving this vision: active living.

“Active living” is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines in order to accumulate at least 30 minutes of activity each day. In November 2003, 1000 Friends of New Mexico and the Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living (Alliance) received a five-year, \$200,000 grant as part of the Active Living by Design national program (www.activelivingbydesign.org) funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. By advocating for changes in community design, specifically land use, transportation, parks, trails, and greenways, the Active Living by Design initiative was intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines.¹

The Active Living by Design Community Action Model provided five active living strategies to influence community change: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policies, and Physical Projects. The 5Ps represent a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through short-term, intermediate, and long-term community changes. This inclusive model allowed the Alliance to better create visibility and support for active living while advancing policy changes for long-term impacts.

Active Living by Design Community Action Model

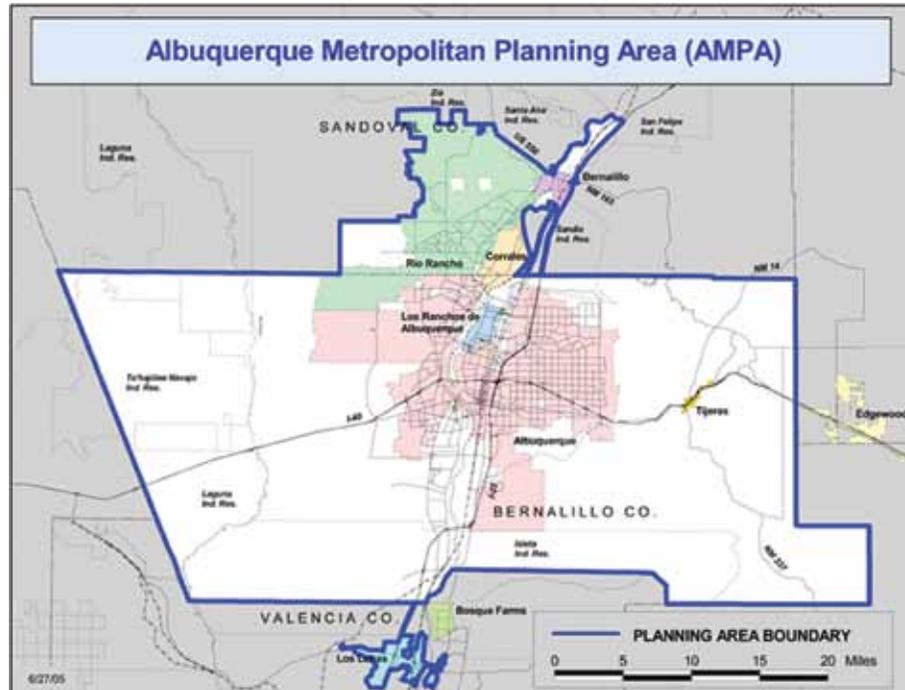


For the Alliance partners, active living principles became part of the lens through which they viewed the future. Active living became a priority in development planning, design, and funding for many of Albuquerque’s residents, elected officials, and community organizations. The Alliance’s work in the community positively changed resident, business, and organizational attitudes towards active living by demonstrating that streets and public spaces can support physical activity. The City of Albuquerque and the Albuquerque School District incorporated active living and wellness language into many of their policies and programs.

“And I think that within the school, as we have been implementing this in the past couple years, the language is kind of shifting in the school community about how...it might not be on the top of the list, but wellness is important... people have the word wellness in mind and they’re talking about it more and more and trying to find the connections.” -Partner

¹ The Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2001, and its National Program Office (NPO) is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Twenty-five interdisciplinary community partnerships were selected across the country to demonstrate how changing community design can impact physical activity. Transtria was funded by RWJF to work with the NPO to conduct ALbD evaluation and dissemination activities. This case report draws from Transtria’s evaluation efforts.

Albuquerque, New Mexico



Albuquerque is a diverse city, with racial and ethnic minorities representing a large portion of its 521,000 residents. The population is comprised of approximately 50% Caucasian, 40% Hispanic, 5% American Indian, and 3% African American residents. The city has an automobile-centered culture, historically encouraged by the old Route 66 corridor that cuts through the city. Less than 3% of the population commutes to work by walking. The three focus areas selected for the Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative have cultural and historical relevance. The Downtown neighborhoods include historic Hispanic settlements and pre-World War II neighborhoods developed during the railroad boom. The Nob Hill area consists of pre- and post-war subdivisions and a main street business district. Atrisco, which emerged as the primary focus of the Alliance midway through the grant, recently celebrated the 300th anniversary of its colonization by Spain. The communities are ethnically and economically diverse and face numerous health issues, including high rates of diabetes and unintentional injury caused by vehicle and bicycle accidents. In 2000-2001, 22.4% of all traffic deaths were pedestrians, a rate much higher than the national average. The three neighborhoods experienced disinvestment and blight in the last 30 years due to sprawl-oriented development. While all of the communities lack recreational facilities and sidewalks, Atrisco has a unique opportunity to develop trail networks using historic irrigation ditches.

Through the leadership of 1000 Friends of New Mexico and the support of numerous partners, the Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living engaged residents and organizations in efforts to improve their communities to encourage active living. Physical improvements were expected to occur as an outcome of policy changes, with programs and promotions supporting the engagement of relevant stakeholders. This brief provides an overview of the Alliance's active living efforts. Overall, the staff and partners emphasized the importance of creating realistic work plans and clarifying expectations and boundaries within the partnership in order to effectively promote active living principles.

The Alliance's ALbD work plan included four goals:

- target three areas on the historic Route 66 corridor to implement physical projects promoting a pedestrian friendly culture
- implement walking and biking programs in the target areas
- change city and school building policies
- develop a graduate course at the University of New Mexico based on active living principles

Preparation

Partnership

While the Alliance was assembled in 2003 for the purposes of developing and submitting the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) ALbD grant, a number of the partners worked together previously on policy-related activities. For example, the lead agency, 1000 Friends of New Mexico and National Park Service, worked with new urbanist developers, transportation organizations, neighborhood associations, and community groups to promote policy changes and public education about the health, community, and economic benefits of developing a compact urban form.

The Alliance was a loosely aligned group of organizations that worked on projects, policies, and programs based on organizational interest. Many partners were involved with specific activities or programs in a particular neighborhood rather than the partnership as a whole.

“[The partnership has] all kinds of different people in the community that aren’t representing their group to the Alliance but they’re associated with an activity or with the other neighborhoods that we were working in at one point, or with our policy work...so then when I put out that I need some activity, like I need you to show up at an event, hopefully they still feel like they are associated with an alliance for active living.” -Staff

“There were a lot of things going on, but it was good to meet, it was a way to network with other people and get support for things you knew had to be done. And perhaps think a little outside the box that you were stuck in at the moment so that you could push something maybe a little bit more comprehensive. So the Alliance didn’t necessarily initiate every project, but it brought together people in a way, it became like a little think tank.” -Partner

Alliance staff and partners worked continuously to build and cultivate relationships so that when they needed to engage a particular organization or department, those relationships were already established. As new organizations and individuals became involved, they were encouraged to bring their contacts and partners to the table. For example, one partner with ties to the health sector was able to increase the representation of health professionals, and another partner used his connection to the planning and academic sectors to secure additional assistance for partnership projects. In addition, Alliance staff members participated in various committees and initiatives to network with other organizations, build collaboration, and bring awareness to the Alliance. This networking increased active living discussions in various venues throughout Albuquerque.

“I was just impressed by the types of people and diversity of people that can get into the room and have space to collaborate and throw ideas around and then all the work that’s already been done to that point. It seemed like it was a successful framework for communicating and moving ideas and just getting conversation, I think it’s hard to quantify what a conversation or a dialog really has - but it does. If you’re able to get people talking a language, that’s a step forward.” -Partner

Quarterly partnership meetings were held to discuss public information and policy issues. The partnership was further broken down into committees (e.g., Steering Committee, Policy Committee, Safe Routes and Ditches with Trails Committee) that met more regularly depending on the needs of the particular group. The Alliance's quarterly meetings were used to provide ALbD project updates and allow partners to casually dialogue and network about their work, which proved just as useful to advancing the mission and goals of the Alliance as did the structured agenda.

In order to keep the partners engaged outside of the quarterly meetings, the Project Director sent e-mails and newsletters to both formal partners and non-partner individuals and organizations that had shown interest in active living and the Alliance. These communications included meeting and event reminders, highlighted developments in projects or active living research, and recruited individuals and organizations for upcoming projects and events.

In Year 2, the partnership worked to clearly define and narrow its mission and focus. The Alliance's mission was to build partnerships to change public attitudes and behaviors, improve public policies, and develop projects that made it easy, safe, and pleasant to walk, ride bicycles, and enjoy other outdoor activities. The Alliance also narrowed the majority of its work to the Atrisco neighborhood while continuing to support policy change in the Downtown and Nob Hill neighborhoods.

The partners and staff faced a number of challenges to developing and maintaining the Alliance partnership:

- Initially, the partnership had a low level of participation from health-related organizations because of a lack of understanding about the link between policy, built environment, and health.
- Participation and involvement of neighborhood associations slowly diminished as the Alliance shifted its focus to lower income neighborhoods, which tended to lack active neighborhood associations.
- While having a wide array of partners had long-term benefits, narrowing the partnership's scope and, engaging partners consistently were difficult.
- The partnership struggled to balance the input and direction of the lead agency with the desired goals of the Alliance.
- Partners found it difficult to coordinate programs and projects through the Alliance without losing individual recognition for their work, which was important to obtain funding and support.
- There were delays in Alliance timelines and work plans that were dependent on the timelines and work plans of outside organizations.
- The loss of key partners made maintaining the partnership difficult.
- The Alliance found it difficult to tailor messages to potential partners who did not make active living a priority.
- The lead agency closed at the end of the ALbD grant period, which led to the dissolution of the Alliance.

“There were many difficulties with the partnership. To actually get things off the ground I think there was some trouble because we were extremely ambitious, both in terms of our target areas as well as our city-wide, policy-level work... there will be that issue of us working in many arenas.” -Staff

“Every non-profit’s scraping for recognition, [so they can] get a dollar. That’s the way it works.” -Partner

“The Alliance is getting credit for doing stuff, whether or not it was a Parks Service project, a WALK Albuquerque, or a Department of Health public health project. It’s a tricky wording balance issue...” -Partner

“Some things did get off the ground, but some partners felt like they really weren’t becoming engaged in a full planning partnership development manner. [The Project Director] was very strong on policy-level issues and continuing to do many of the things that she feels very comfortable doing and so some partners weren’t engaged in planning and so on and so forth.” -Staff

Staff, partners, and community members also identified a number of strengths:

- Partners valued the Alliance as a place to enhance their knowledge and expertise and a place to engage in meaningful collaborative activities and exchanges.
 - The partnership bridged the gap between seemingly unrelated organizations to make a lasting impact on the environment and the attitudes of Albuquerque residents toward active living.
 - City planners noted that working with the Alliance connected them to advocates and experts essential to advancing active living principles.
 - The work plans for the final years of the grant took into consideration available resources, working relationships, partner abilities, and unaccomplished work.
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“It is also been a learning experience for me as a planner, as we discuss the issues around healthy lifestyles and how we might promote them in the physical design in our communities and at our institutions.” -Partner

“We all have a variety of ways that we work in our professional lives and we all bring that to the Alliance...and we learn from each other.” -Partner

“The Alliance has allowed us to do a variety of things that sometimes don’t look as though there’s a grand plan behind it, but somehow they will begin to dovetail.” -Partner

The table below lists the partners involved in the Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living partnership.

Members of the Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living partnership	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicine Institute for Public Health • New Mexico Department of Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Division of Public Health - New Mexico Health Care Takes On Diabetes • University of New Mexico Department of Family and Community
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Albuquerque Public Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Department of Facilities Planning and Construction - Wellness Coordinator
Parks & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Park Service
Urban Design & Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Albuquerque Planning Department • University of New Mexico <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School of Architecture and Planning - Design Planning Assistance Center
Community Leaders, Policy- & Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bernalillo County Commissioner’s Office • City of Albuquerque City Council Office
Other Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District • Surface Transportation Policy Project
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1000 Friends of New Mexico* • Bike Albuquerque • Walk Albuquerque
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arcadia Land Company • Historic District Improvement Company • Paradigm and Company • Nob Hill/ Highland Renaissance Corporation
Community & Faith-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vecinos del Bosque Neighborhood Association

*Organization that served as lead agency during the ALbD grant period

Leadership and Champions

1000 Friends of New Mexico was a non-profit membership group that advocated for sustainable community development across New Mexico. The Director of 1000 Friends of New Mexico was responsible for submitting the ALbD proposal and developing the Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living. After some transitions in staffing in the initial year of the funding, 1000 Friends of New Mexico hired a Project Director using ALbD grant funds. 1000 Friends of New Mexico closed in the final year of the grant, due to a lack of funding.

The involvement of the Project Director was essential to the growth and development of the Alliance, but, at the same time, the partnership struggled with the involvement of the lead agency because of the Project Director’s leadership style and level of participation. The partnership specifically worked to define the scope of work and involvement of the lead agency in the partnership and was able to work through the challenges.

“[The Project Director] used what I consider to be really extraordinary, almost inspirational, leadership... She was very persuasive, she’s very charismatic, she’s comfortable... and most importantly [she made] a connection between what we were doing and everything that’s happening in California.” -Partner

In addition to the Project Director, a School Wellness Advocate was hired by the Alliance. The part-time contractor assisted in the implementation and integration of the Wellness Policy and Safe Routes to School activities. This position struggled to be effective because of staff turnover, difficulties with school administration, and lack of parental support for school-based activities.

Several staff members and community members were integral to the creation and success of the Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living, but one community member was continuously mentioned as a catalyst to the success of the partnership. His commitment to the Community Bicycle Recycling Program translated to a commitment to many active living programs and events, including Ditches with Trails, Safe Routes to School, and Walk to School Day. Because of his commitment and success, the partnership focused much of its work in an area of Atrisco called Vecinos del Bosque. The support and strength of this champion allowed for significant impact to be made in the areas in which he was involved.

Staff, partners, and community members described the champion in the following ways:

- able to engage many different communities and audiences
- well-connected with a strong network of resources
- well-known and respected in the community
- vocal and persuasive
- possessed the ability to leverage funding

“...every kid knows who he is and every teacher knows who he is. In the community he’s kind of like the father of the community in some ways.” -Partner

“I mean [the Champion] more than others, had a lot of passion that this could happen.” -Partner

Funding and Resources

The Alliance focused on obtaining funds from New Mexico state tax revenue, rather than on applying for grants, because capital outlay funds were perceived as easier to obtain. Although the partnership did not commit significant resources to obtaining additional funding, nonetheless, they were able to leverage the ALbD grant to obtain \$3,422,850 for active living for the Albuquerque area. The partners reached out to a number of local, state, and national funders to expand the amount of financial resources available to support and grow the Alliance’s initiatives. Some of the grant funding came from the following organizations:

- Albuquerque Public Schools
- America Walks
- City of Albuquerque City Budget and Street Bonds
- City of Albuquerque Urban Enhancement Trust Fund
- McCune Charitable Trust
- New Mexico Department of Health
- New Mexico Legislature and capital outlays
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Special Opportunities Grant, Healthy Eating by Design)
- WK Kellogg Foundation

In addition to grants and financial support, many organizations and community members supported the partnership with in-kind donations. For example, the National Park Services supported Prescription Trails staff; the City of Albuquerque, Albuquerque Public Schools, and South Valley Male Improvement Project donated bicycles, mechanic staff, and repair space; and the New Mexico Department of Health developed and printed walking maps.

Community Supports and Challenges

“You have to find a way to get into that community and get somebody really jazzed about it.” -Partner

Albuquerque and its neighborhoods experienced many challenges and supports for active living. Like many large cities, Albuquerque’s annexed neighborhoods expand far from the center of the city. This urban sprawl affected development and upkeep of the older residential areas in Albuquerque. These neighborhoods struggled despite attempts to attract attention to these historic districts with new civic plazas, museums, and parks. One neighborhood, Atrisco, is characterized by having few resources and high poverty rates. The neighborhood is 77% Hispanic, and 20% of residents live below the poverty level.



Three ALbD neighborhoods were selected because of their lack of facilities, incomplete sidewalks, and unique features (e.g., irrigation ditches). The irrigation ditches were designed to bring water to agricultural fields. Because of the 300-year history behind the ditches, they were of cultural importance to many residents in the valley where Atrisco is located. In the past, neighborhood associations and organizations maintained the ditches, but as the use of the ditches declined so did the community involvement in their maintenance. Many residents were interested in preserving the ditches as well as using them for recreation, but this was a challenge because of sanitation and safety concerns.

Staff, partners, and community members provided the following challenges faced by the three communities:

- Available sidewalks often lacked accessibility due to fire hydrants and other barriers.
- Lack of sidewalks forced children to walk in the street to school.
- Frequent flooding and poor drainage on area streets and sidewalks inhibited use.
- Stray dogs on school routes and irrigation ditches contributed to safety concerns.
- City and county officials struggled to determine who was responsible for water and sewer lines in certain areas of the neighborhoods, which led to jurisdictional issues surrounding physical improvements and maintenance.
- The population tended to be car-oriented due to lack of public transportation.
- There was a large homeless population.
- Albuquerque was home to both new immigrants and long-established ethnic and racial sub-populations.
- A quarter of Albuquerque households spoke only Spanish.
- Children change schools often during their academic career, making it difficult to build support and ensure continuity of messaging.
- Schools struggled to meet national educational standards, causing the need to focus on academics to outweigh physical activity.
- Many schools had open spaces available for students but lack adequate playgrounds.



With a relatively large transient population in Atrisco, the partnership found it challenging to gain resident participation and establish long-term programs. Many community members saw themselves as temporary residents and did not get involved in the community. Securing resident involvement was a time-consuming process for the partnership but was highly valued by the Alliance. For example, the persistence of the partners to involve the community in the Ditches with Trails project created community ownership and pride as well as involved residents in maintenance and promotion of the historic ditches. The involvement of organizations, such as the Albuquerque School District and religious organizations, had an impact on resident involvement in the partnership as well. One local parish was influential in changing community members' perceptions about active living by supporting many active living programs and activities and prompting people to prioritize their health and wellness.

“Having the support of the community institutions like Holy Family church... provides the critical mass to get things done, to get the community involved. Holy Family church is obviously a very respected institution in the community, a big draw...” -Staff

While the Albuquerque School District's capabilities were sometimes limited due to budget and academic concerns, the district and local schools began to prioritize wellness towards the end of the funding period. The School Health Advisory Council included childhood obesity as one of five action plan issues, and principals encouraged staff to participate in active living programs, such as Safe Routes to School. Administrative support, encouragement, and incentives proved key to engaging staff, parents, and students.

The lead agency had a tenuous relationship with many government officials. While some Alliance staff and partners perceived the mayor as difficult to work with at times, he did permit various city departments to continue to participate in Alliance activities. For example, the parks department was involved in the Prescription Trails project. Alliance staff observed that the mayor tended to be supportive of activities that he saw as a good fit for his political agenda.

A majority of the work in the political arena was done with the assistance of City Council members, who advocated for and supported active living policy initiatives. Council members were instrumental in overcoming political barriers to active living and incorporating the active living agenda into the city's work plan and budget.

“There were some councilors who started coming to Alliance meetings that were wanting to see if they could use their districts as an impetus for change in policy and do pilot projects.” -Partner

The Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living was able to gain support from elected officials by providing them with opportunities for good press, consistently advocating for community investment in projects and activities, and aligning the partnership's mission with their priorities of elected officials.

While the partnership had some success with City Council members, they still faced considerable challenges:

- Officials believed that they would hamper growth if they went against the developers or asked developers to make changes to benefit the community.
- Turnover of elected officials made government support unstable.
- At times, the partnership's limited resources made it difficult to maintain relationships.
- The priorities between different layers of government were often at odds.
- The slow pace of government disrupted the partnership's schedule and work plans.

“You really don't know how some people, particularly those in office, are going to behave. And we've really scratched our heads in wonder at why some things take so long in the political process.” -Staff

Community Assessment

The success of the Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living was due in large part to the various assessments conducted by the partnership members and community members. The Alliance and its partners conducted surveys, charrettes, walking audits, and neighborhood mapping in order to help identify community supports and barriers to physical activity.

Students involved in Landscape Architecture and Town Design & Public Health courses at the University of New Mexico developed assessment processes to evaluate physical improvements needed in the community, specifically related to Safe Routes to School and Ditches with Trails. Students enrolled in the courses conducted assessments and developed comprehensive reports of physical improvements needed in the ALbD project areas, including crosswalks, traffic calming, ditchbank improvements, traffic safety signage, and interpretive signage. The reports compiled by the students were then distributed by the partnership to the community and elected officials and were used to address and inform infrastructure-related problems and initiatives.

“The town design and public health [course] really helped to create some greater understanding not only by the students but by the faculty on the importance of measuring the built environment.” -Staff

Because the assessments were conducted as part of a university course, there was little community resident representation in the process. This lack of community representation in the assessment project led to a lack of community support for the assessment. As a result, the partnership ensured community representation in future projects and programs for increased interest and success. Several community charrettes were conducted to discuss Great Street concepts, city plans, and the Ditches with Trails project. The partnership conducted a walkability audit in conjunction with the Central Highland Charrette in the Nob Hill neighborhood. The audit was used to generate public interest in plans for improvements to the physical environment and to update the sector plan.

The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD), a partner of the Ditches with Trails project, commissioned a survey to look at recreational habits around the ditches and to assess how willing community members would be to allocate a portion of their taxes to the MRGCD to support the development of recreational trails. Eighty-three percent of respondents indicated that they were in favor of such a proposal.

Focus groups were conducted with the Vecinos del Bosque Neighborhood Association members to discuss active living initiatives in the neighborhood. From these focus groups, the partnership developed the small social marketing campaign, “Take a Walk.”

Students at Valle Vista Elementary School created maps of their walking routes as part of Safe Routes to Schools. The maps identified various landscape and community markers as well as safety issues faced by the students. Residents from five different neighborhoods also identified and mapped neighborhood features. These maps were used to create Neighborhood Walking Guides, which highlighted different walking routes in the neighborhoods.

Policies and Physical Projects

To create more opportunities for active living in Albuquerque, the Alliance combined policy changes and physical projects with promotional and programmatic efforts. The partnership believed policy change to be the most sustainable means of achieving improvements to active living in the Albuquerque area, and, thus, focused much of its efforts on reforming policy to be more inclusive of active living ideas.

► **Great Streets Facilities Plan**

- The Alliance saw the need to create templates for a variety of street types and to redesign and reconstruct segments of existing streets to support walking and biking.
- A supportive city council member added amendments to the 2005 Capital Improvement Plan to include funding and direction for the Great Streets Initiative. City of Albuquerque residents voted to approve \$3.2 million for Great Streets, \$1.8 million for sidewalks and landscaping, \$100,000 for a Great Streets study or facilities plan, and additional funding for improvement to sector plans.
- After securing funds, the Planning Department and its Technical Advisory Team, which included Alliance partners and allies, convened public hearings and developed a draft Great Streets plan that included design concepts for five types of Great Streets and identified street segments that had the potential to become Great Streets.
- The public involvement process attracted 240 community residents, indicating an interest in and support for walkable, bikeable streets.
- Using funds from the RWJF Special Opportunities Grant, the Alliance developed a targeted audience marketing strategy to engage young professionals in advocating for the adoption and long-term implementation of the Great Streets plan.
- The completion of the Great Streets plan was delayed due to numerous rewrites and slow bureaucratic processes, and a final plan was finalized, reviewed, and recommended for approval at the end of the ALbD grant period.
- While the plan was not adopted by the City Council by the end of the grant period, smaller street improvement projects have been influenced by the plan; for example, a council member secured improvements for the Nob Hill neighborhood, including curb bulb-outs and median refuges along the busiest transit corridor in the city.



“Another really important policy initiative that actually we initiated was to get the city of Albuquerque to try to create more models of great streets. We don’t have that many examples here. Most of our growth happened after the war. So we’re really car-oriented.” -Staff

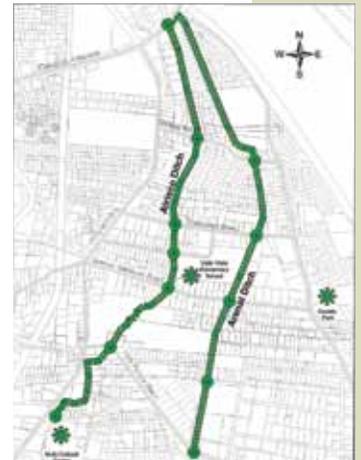
► **Metropolitan Transportation Plan**

- From 2005 to 2007, the Mid Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) worked to update the regional Metropolitan Transportation Plan.
- Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living viewed this revision process as an opportunity to include active living language in the plan and to direct the legislative focus towards creating improvements to accommodate the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists.
- The Alliance, as part of the Public Involvement Committee, wrote new objectives for the pedestrian section of the plan and developed a proposal to establish a Walkable Neighborhoods Grant Program to provide planning funds for walking and bicycling enhancement projects in communities in the region.
- To influence MRCOG to include these revisions, the Alliance encouraged health partners and other stakeholders to advocate and submit written letters of support for the Walkable Neighborhoods Grant Program.
- The Alliance developed an advocacy program to inform and engage stakeholders in the planning process.
- A public forum was conducted with walking expert Mark Fenton.
- While the updated plan included the Walkable Neighborhoods Grant Program, the transportation board members and staff would not commit to fund the program.

“Although we didn’t get the money that we wanted or even the type of program that we wanted, the fact that we were able to get out there and get a couple of members of the Metropolitan Transportation Board kind of nodding their heads and saying, ‘Yeah, this is something we need to work on. We’re grossly deficient in how we allocate resources, and we need to do better next time around.’ Just getting the dialog started, I think, is a good beginning.” -Partner

► **Ditches with Trails**

- Ditches with Trails was a policy and physical project designed to satisfy community demands to use Atrisco’s irrigation ditches for recreational purposes.
- Policy guidelines were developed to make the ditches usable and functional while still respecting the connection to the agricultural, ecological, historical, and cultural background of the ditches.
- To accommodate residents’ wishes for recreation and preservation, policy guidelines focused on maintenance of the natural function of the ditches, protection of native wildlife and ecology, development of path designs that did not incorporate hardscaping elements (paved sidewalks, curbs, gutters) in order to preserve the semi-rural quality of the ditches, inclusion of features that addressed safety concerns (motor vehicle travel, crime, loose dogs), and requirement of routine maintenance.
- The Alliance partners associated with this project identified a continuous ditch network throughout the region and then developed and beautified the trails for recreational use. Improvements to the trails included adding directional and informational signage, widening the paths, cleaning debris from the paths, limiting access to the trails to only pedestrians and bicyclists, and applying stabilizers and surface grading instead of pavement.
- In the final months of the ALbD grant, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District established two pilot areas for the Ditches with Trails project.
- While the Ditches with Trails project faced major opposition, and decision makers rejected the full action plan during the ALbD grant period, partners continued to advocate for the project.



“And these ditches are sitting there, there’s a perfect opportunity for kids being physically active, of course that was the goal of the Alliance, to increase the active living health of the community...” -Partner

“Three years ago it was pretty standard to see ‘No Trespassing’ signs up on the ditch banks...now we see ‘Welcome to our open space’ signs being posted throughout the network.” -Partner

► **Other Policies and Physical Projects**

- Form-based zoning codes were incorporated into development plans for various neighborhoods; these codes set standards for land use and street design and serve as implementation tools to support physical activity in neighborhoods.
- Based on the partnership's Priority Changes to City Regulations and Processes to Improve the Environment for Active Living report, a comprehensive set of amendments were written by City staff for future approval.
- Recommendations for updated standards and a transportation tax to increase funds for pedestrian and bicycle updates were developed by the City of Albuquerque's 21st Century Task Force.
- The Alliance supported a number of active living-related planning processes, including the East Downtown Master Plan and the Nob Hill/Highland Sector Plan.
- The Alliance was involved in the integration and improvement of existing health and wellness policies in the Albuquerque School District, including Safe Routes to School policies and School Health Advisory Council Action Plans.

Challenges

Staff, partners, and community members described several challenges that limited the partnership's ability to create policy and physical environment changes:

- The Alliance lost several partners who had expertise in policy work.
- Local political tensions and elected official turnover slowed progress.
- It was difficult to maintain relationships with key political figures who had limited understanding of active living.
- Policy changes were dependent on government processes.
- Delays and the closure of the lead agency made it difficult to sustain public interest.
- In some cases, policies and actions contradicted each other; for example, the school districted supported Safe Routes to Schools but expanded bus service to students living less than a half-mile from schools.
- Policy changes were a slow process in which small successes were hard to demonstrate and community support were hard to maintain.
- The Alliance depended on partners outside of the policymaking process to advocate for change.

“Timing is so difficult sometimes, there will be the need to energize people when the hearings process gets going, and then we’re going have to reenergize people when the voting on the money process gets going.” -Staff

“One of the other areas that I certainly learned from...was that because time tables are often lengthened in planning processes by at least governments in New Mexico, the ability and available resources for non-governmental partners to stay connected, to keep attending meetings, to maintain advocacy types of communications and so forth, is very, very, very trying.” -Staff

“It is really hard to get people to kinda pop out of all the busy work that they are doing at their normal jobs to do something extra. So I think that focused things, like the trails project, I think the projects actually, people see more success in them, the policies have longer lasting effect, but people don’t see that, I mean it’s kinda under the radar screen. So I’m thinking that the lesson learned is you have to do both but you always have to have some kind of project that brings people together to work on the same goals in different ways.” -Staff

“It’s very difficult for those of us who are partners, who are in government, to deal with the council, the councilors, or the administration in a way that is sort of beyond our job. We can’t influence them politically; it just can’t be done. So, we had to depend on people who were outside the system to take on that role.” -Partner

“I think policy was a really difficult thing to take on, it’s something that we centered on...It’s hard, I think sometimes you don’t have all the right players at the right time and sometimes the first year is all about getting, actually the whole five years was about getting different groups of players to work together...because once people realize that, we kind of know it intuitively.” -Partner

Staff, partners, and community members identified numerous challenges to developing policy guidelines for Ditches with Trails:

- There was a lack of consistent support from Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District due to staff turnover and resistance to nontraditional development ideas.
- Because the project was long-term, partners had difficulty securing commitment from community organizations.
- The Alliance did not always have answers for questions related to liability and maintenance.
- Maintaining a balance between development and preservation proved challenging.
- The project was slowed by loss of funding.

Promotions and Programs

To raise awareness of policy and physical project efforts and build support for active living, the partnership developed a number of promotional and programmatic efforts. Programs and promotions, related partner, staff, community implementation activities, and associated outcomes are described as follows:

▶ Take a Walk Social Marketing Campaign

- Through RWJF sponsored training with Spitfire Communications, the partnership developed a social marketing campaign targeting a neighborhood with a large Hispanic population that had shown interest and involvement in previous partnership activities.
- The Alliance designed active living messages that were discussed and voted on by male and female community focus groups.
- The message, “Take a friend for a walk, for your health,” was imprinted on magnets in English and Spanish and distributed at community events.
- Through a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health, the Alliance hired a media consultant and developed additional campaign materials and activities, including 2,500 bilingual rack cards distributed at four health clinics, 178 radio promotions aired on two Spanish radio stations, a Take a Walk event sponsored by Univision Radio, and a local community affairs talk show feature on the campaign.
- The Take a Walk materials were well received by the local public health clinics because of their practicality and relevance to the community.

“I think we just felt that, we knew there was an enormous need for Hispanic women to get more active and feel like they could leave their home and take a walk.” -Staff

► **Neighborhood Walking Guides**

- After learning about another ALbD grantee’s walking guide promotion, the Alliance worked with WALK Albuquerque, neighborhood associations, and the City of Albuquerque to develop walking guides to encourage physical activity and community engagement.
- Neighborhood residents from the three ALbD communities were invited to attend a training that taught them how to “see” their neighborhoods as pedestrians did and how to create walking routes.
- Community members were invited to create and submit their own routes; five were selected to be published.
- The guides included maps, narrative descriptions of walking routes, and attractions in five Albuquerque neighborhoods along the Ditches with Trails network.
- Partners printed 2,500 copies, which were distributed in community centers, visitors’ centers, libraries, and free-of-charge online.
- The guides also allowed the partnership to host special guided walks associated with various conferences, classes, and events in the Albuquerque area.

► **Prescription Trails**

- Alliance partners and the New Mexico Health Care Takes on Diabetes coalition developed a Prescription Trails program based on the Spitfire Communications training.
- The Alliance collaborated with health professionals and organizations to create a program that would best reach patients at risk for diseases and conditions associated with a sedentary lifestyle.
- The printed form allowed health care providers and educators to prescribe physical activity on local trails tailored to the individual, based on trail location and level of difficulty.
- Recipients were also given a Walking Trail Guide featuring 34 walking trails with their tailored prescription.
- Health care providers and diabetes educators conducted a nine-week pilot of the Prescription Trails tool; evaluation results from the pilot were used to modify the prescription tool and distribution plan.
- The parks department promoted the Prescription Trails program by placing the Walking Trail Guide on its website and making minor trail improvements (<http://www.cabq.gov/parks/prescription-trails>).
- A local newspaper independently decided to feature a different trail from the program every week.
- The program was essential to engaging the missing health sector component of the partnership.
- In the future, the Alliance hopes to market an adopt-a-trail promotional campaign to local businesses to create sustainability and community support for Prescription Trails.



TAKE A FRIEND FOR A WALK, FOR YOUR HEALTH.

- 1] **You're never too busy to take care of you.**
It may seem like somebody needs you every minute. Your children, husband, mother. They depend on you. But as much as you do for them, take a little time to do something for yourself.
 - 2] **Walking is easy, healthy and fun.**
Walking is the easiest exercise of all. Just 10, 15 or 30 minutes a day, and you will feel better. You'll look better, think better, and enjoy your family more.
 - 3] **Best of all, you don't have to do it alone.**
Take a friend along. Have fun, get energized and stay healthy at the same time. Get started today!
- Take a friend for a walk, for your health.



ALBUQUERQUE Prescription TRAILS

Rx for Health: Get Up and Get Moving!

Congratulations on deciding to increase your physical activity!
Below is the plan we discussed to start you on your way.

How long? How Often?

15 minutes M T W Th F S Su

20 minutes

25 minutes Where? _____

30 minutes

We will review this plan at next visit: _____ Date _____

Patient signature: _____ Date _____

Provider signature: _____ Date: _____

► **University-level Courses**

- Public health and planning partners from the Alliance developed a graduate-level course, “Town Design and Public Health,” for the Public Health and the Regional Planning programs at the University of New Mexico.
- Students in the class not only received classroom education on active living and design but also completed hands-on assessment projects in the Albuquerque community.
- The groups in the planning course used different tools than the landscape architects and approached the project differently; public health students concentrated on the Safe Routes to School program, while the landscape architecture students aligned their assessment work with the Ditches with Trails program.
- An additional course, “Walking and Rolling around Albuquerque,” was designed as a continuing education course by a student from the Town Design and Public Health course to study walkability and design factors in Albuquerque neighborhoods.

► **Safe Routes to School**

- The Alliance conducted Safe Routes to School activities at Valle Vista Elementary School in Atrisco and two additional elementary schools in the South Valley area of Albuquerque, based on their lack of existing resources.
- Alliance partners funded a School Wellness Advocate contract position within the school district in part to support Safe Routes to School efforts.
- The Alliance co-sponsored a Safe Routes to School workshop with Mark Fenton (supported by a RWJF Special Opportunities grant) for area schools that helped generate interest in and gain support for the Safe Routes to School program.
- University students supported Safe Routes to School efforts by preparing comprehensive reports and maps of problems in the physical environment around the school.
- Events and programs, held by the schools in support of Safe Routes to School, included a pedestrian safety training class for fourth graders, walking recess events, three walking school bus events, and a Bike and Walk to School Day.
- Over 800 children and their families participated in school-based activities that encouraged walking and bicycling.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL IN THE VECINOS DEL BOSQUE NEIGHBORHOOD: A DESIGN PROPOSAL



► **Community Events**

- The Active Living Celebration, in conjunction with the Nob Hill Chili Cook-off, included information handouts, walking tour, and a bike race.
- The Luminaria Event included walks on the ditch network and wagon rides.
- A Slow Down Demonstration distributed speeding tickets to increase awareness of a dangerous intersection in the Atrisco neighborhood.
- The Holiday Walk in Atrisco featured the Ditches with Trails network.
- Booths at neighborhood association meetings, symposia, and National Night Out events provided information about active living to community members.
- A Great Streets Open Houses event introduced Great Streets plans to community members.

► **Forums and Conferences**

- At Revolucion en las Calles, a regional pedestrian advocacy conference, participants discussed policy work and neighborhood improvements.
- At an Elected Official Conference, the partnership hosted elected officials from small towns in New Mexico to discuss town design, public health, and walkability.
- The Growing Pains: Community Responses to Obesity forum, held in conjunction with Albuquerque Public Schools, discussed issues in the school and community and gave attendees an opportunity to network.
- The “Does the Albuquerque Region Walk the Talk?” public forum allowed various community organizations to build support for the Metropolitan Transportation Plan’s inclusion of pedestrian improvements and the Walkable Neighborhoods Grant Program.

► **Community Bike Recycle Program**

- The Community Bike Recycle Program received bicycle and bicycle part donations, rehabilitated bicycles, held repair and safety classes, and distributed over 1,900 bicycles to lower income children, homeless individuals, disabled veterans, and transitional families to provide greater access to active living options.

► **Other promotional efforts**

- Alliance partners produced at least 18 newspaper articles, 7 television spots, 184 radio hits, 6 organizational publication items, and over 2,000 website hits during the ALbD grant period.
- 1000 Friends of New Mexico added a Transportation/Active Living section to its website to promote Alliance-related activities.
- The Alliance posted a collection of active-living related photographs (ActiveABQ at flickr.com) for public use in research and presentations.
- The Alliance sent an e-newsletter on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to approximately 170 partners and interested parties to provide project updates and resources.

Strengths and Challenges

Staff, partners, and community members identified strengths in developing and implementing programs and promotions:

- The Alliance brought health-related partners to the table by investing time and resources in projects that appealed to health care providers and health educators and made the connection between health, policy, and the built environment.
- Partners made use of ALbD National Program Office technical assistance and training opportunities in order to build skills and expertise.
- The Alliance recognized the need to target its programs and promotions to individual communities.
- The social marketing campaign helped the partnership regain momentum and focus in the midst of staff changes and partnership struggles.
- The Alliance linked efforts, when appropriate, to build support and maximize resources.

“That was an important bridge-building effort. It’s great to have health partners thinking about prescribing walking, but when we began to get folks from Blue Cross Blue Shield and a couple of other groups like the Medical Association to sign letters to their regional council of governments on a transportation funding plan, that was a bridge.”

“The relationship with the health partners that we built with the folks during the Prescription Trails Program was kind of empowering people in the health professions to be advocates for this much, much larger regional initiative.” -Staff

Staff, partners, and community members identified challenges to developing and implementing programs and promotions:

- There was a lack of parental involvement in Safe Routes to School efforts.
- Inconsistent administration and staff support for school-based efforts hampered progress.
- The parent teacher association fundraising efforts benefited classroom development rather than extracurricular programs (e.g., Safe Routes to School).
- The ALbD champion became less involved in Alliance activities as his Community Bike Recycle Program became more complex.
- Creating programs and promotions that appealed to diverse communities was difficult because of a lack of expertise.

“In the area of promotion, that was very slow-starting...because there was not so much of skills in that area.” -Staff

“It’s most interesting to see how this is going to evolve now that we have people coming from other countries who are living in Albuquerque...There’s a lot of people living in it who are from Mexico. And they don’t come to any public meetings. You can have translators, you can go door-to-door and invite them, you can do all kinds of other things, but they will not come because it’s not the way they know how to do business...” -Partner

Sustainability

During the ALbD grant period, Alliance partners expanded the active living movement in Albuquerque by incorporating active living messages into their work. The ALbD funding and work of the partnership initiated the increased attention to active living in the area.

“More people got very turned on to this stuff and in a way some are continuing their work, but they are continuing their work in their own way.” -Staff

“I think that things are starting to happen on their own...You put it out there and then they take on a life of their own, you don’t have to do anything anymore...other people do it.” -Partner

At the end of the ALbD grant, the lead agency folded due to lack of funding. The City’s Office of Council Services was designated as the new lead agency for a RWJF sustainability grant, which focused on establishing a Great Streets Facilities Plan in the City of Albuquerque. In addition to policy work, the other programs were sustained. The Community Bike Recycle Program became independent with support from New Mexico legislators. A Kellogg Food and Fitness Grant received by 1000 Friends of New Mexico allowed continued work on walkability and walking programs. Prescription Trails received additional funding and support from the New Mexico Department of Health.

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