



# **Walkable Communities Media Advocacy Toolkit**

**A guide to working with the media to educate and help spark local  
action to promote more Walkable Communities in Wisconsin.**



Wisconsin  
Department of Health Services

# Walkable Communities Media Advocacy Toolkit

<b>1</b>	Media Strategic Planning and Execution	<b>6</b>
<b>2</b>	Fact Sheet	<b>18</b>
<b>3</b>	Media Guide	<b>20</b>
<b>4</b>	Writing a News Release	<b>23</b>
<b>5</b>	News Release Sample	<b>25</b>
<b>6</b>	Writing a Letter to the Editor	<b>27</b>
<b>7</b>	Letter to the Editor Samples	<b>29</b>
<b>8</b>	Writing an Op-Ed	<b>32</b>
<b>9</b>	Op-Ed Sample	<b>34</b>
<b>10</b>	Media Alert	<b>37</b>
<b>11</b>	Talent Release	<b>39</b>



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Dear Walkable Community Advocate,

So you live in a community where it's difficult to walk many places, such as the library or shopping areas? You're not alone. Most Wisconsin communities, founded in the days of train travel, have been built largely for our cars and trucks, not walkers. In fact, some studies show as much as half a community's land use is devoted to motorized vehicles in the form of highways, interchanges, roads, streets, driveways, parking, and an enormous service industry.

The good news? Ideas to solve these issues are everywhere! Hundreds of organizations ranging from state agencies such as the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), to city planning departments, to nonprofit organizations are engaged in helping build communities where people can walk to work, to the doctor, or to shop.

If you feel your community would benefit from a plan to make it more walkable—a place for people as well as cars—where do you begin?

The following is a guide to help you get started, get organized, and build a consensus for change so that your community has a future path to walkability.

**Research.** Before you get started, visit the DHS website to review what an active community action plan looks like—and the possibilities it suggests for your own community:

- DHS Active Community Initiatives: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/active-communities.htm>
- Active Community Toolkit: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p0/p00036.pdf>

In addition, the Wisconsin Active Communities Alliance (WACA), a growing network of local communities that coordinates a peer learning and action network and helps guide statewide strategy on policy, systems, and environmental change, can provide helpful information. Visit [www.activecommunitieswi.org](http://www.activecommunitieswi.org).

Now you know what you're looking for. Next, visit your own city planning department or village economic development specialist. They're surprisingly accessible and you may find that many city planners have given a great deal of thought—and may already have plans—to make your community more walkable. City planners already know that Walkable Communities are also more livable communities, which raises property values and draws families who want to live in them.

**Get help.** If the city planning department has no plans, they'll know where to send you for expertise. In addition to the resources provided by DHS, tools are available from groups such as 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, the Urban League, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and AARP. All are engaged in telling the Walkable Communities story—and provide easy ideas to improve city and village walkability.

**More help.** We're also building a library of materials for you and your community leaders and city managers to access through the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. This century-old organization represents nearly all of Wisconsin's 599 cities and villages and provides resources, information, and training to help manage and improve Wisconsin communities. They're excited to include walkable information in their resource materials for community leaders exploring ideas to make their communities more attractive places in which to live, work, raise children, and retire.



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**Know who your local city council representative is, as well as your council president, mayor, or board chair.** Cities have elected mayors. Villages have seven elected board members, one of whom is the board chair, who doubles as a sort of mayor. With the exception of mayors, these council and board members are all volunteers who serve because they care about their communities. Villages also have a city administrator and cities have department managers who are paid professionals. They can be very helpful as well. This idea is not new to them!

**Make a list of potential partners and arrange to meet with them informally.** Don't ask for action to be taken. This is information gathering, with a call or meeting to discuss your ideas. Listen carefully and take notes. You'll likely be surprised by the support you'll receive; you'll also likely hear about challenges you may face in proposing large new projects, most of which might be new to you if you haven't ever before been involved in ideas such as this.

Now you're ready to tell your story! Here are the principles of a good organizational approach on how to tell your story to the media and to the public:

**Build a network of like-minded people.** Just as you've built your organization to promote active communities and Walkable Communities, the same is true for communications. You're just one voice . . . you'll be surprised at the number of people in your community who would agree and repeat and reinforce your story in many ways. Remember to include in your network the groups most affected by a lack of "walkability" in your community, such as those who live in parts of your community with few open spaces, serious impediments to "walkability," and areas with high concentrations of health disparities. Note that DHS has an asset mapping "template" that might provide some help: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p0/p00036.pdf> (see appendix A).

**Leadership.** Good leadership isn't just vital to your organization's success, it's also vital to the success you'll have in promoting your Walkable Community story.

**Give your coalition or group a name that is memorable and repeatable.** Don't get too clever. The name has to be true to your vision and truly reflect your goal. Research what other cities in Wisconsin (and other states) have done to look for ways to "brand" your organization and set goals for it.

**Build a strategic plan and integrate that plan into your communications plan.** Build from best practices in other cities. Work with city planners and village economic development specialists on ideas that could, if approved, be incorporated into your city or community's "master plan." The communication plan should include:

- A baseline assessment of what you already have.
- A review of plans already in place but not yet implemented.
- Best practices you've gleaned from other communities that would work in yours.
- A prioritized list of projects.
- Possible challenges to success.
- Potential funding sources.



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**Recruit community partners.** Your coalition of key supporters will become much stronger if you branch out and recruit existing community organizations to support you. Local leaders are also keenly sensitive to the advocacy groups who represent folks with health disparities or who face serious obstacles to healthy living and healthy lifestyles. Organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary, Optimists, and Chambers of Commerce are dedicated to your community and to community service. If you have a solid idea or plan, present it to them and ask for their support. Their members tend to be key influencers in the business community and your community's social networks. They're open to new ideas and they have their own communications and networking systems.

Don't forget to contact and recruit organizations that may already be in place such as land-use advocates, neighborhood groups, your historical society/downtown preservation effort, and environmental and senior citizen groups.

Work closely with local health care organizations and efforts, if possible. They're highly supportive of Walkable Communities, as they are of any effort that would encourage exercise. In some cases, larger health organizations may also be required to help fund local projects that improve community health. Your ideas could become part of their community health outreach plan!

## Market your plan! An introduction to strategic media relations.

Your plan or proposed project is only as good as your ability to tell people about it and convince them that it's positive for your community. Your media outreach toolkit is the foundation of your strategy to communicate your ideas.

In this toolkit, you will find a description of materials you can use to tell your story to the media—and how to do it. Media outreach will be vital to your success because, at its best, your local newspaper and radio station (and TV in a few cases) represent your community's conversation. If done strategically, you can work with media to launch your ideas and remain part of that community conversation as you build support for your ideas. If done poorly, negative stories or editorials can take the wind out of any sail of support.

If you are prepared to tell your story to the media, the materials you have created are also the foundation for all of your public communications. These communications can include brochures, fact sheets, handouts, paid advertising (if possible), and social media—either your own networks, or those of your allies, friends, and partners.

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**Walkable  
Communities  
Media Advocacy  
Toolkit**

**1**

**Media Strategic Planning and Execution**



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Most groups should incorporate an earned media strategy into their integrated efforts to encourage people to “step up” their daily walking. These strategies will also build support for the planning, building, and expanding of walkability and bikeability infrastructure, including open spaces, sidewalks, designated walking and biking paths, and facilities such as pedestrian bridges to link neighborhoods that are split by major obstacles such as highways or rivers. A media strategy is not a story in the newspaper or a television interview. A media strategy is long-term plan to work with local and regional media to help publicize the benefits of walking—and how both individuals and communities alike can “step up” to achieve it.

A solid media strategy gets people talking, builds awareness of the problem, and helps shape opinions about solutions. Ultimately, the right media strategy can help prompt local community leaders to take action to make their cities and villages more walkable.

Here is a basic guide with nine steps to help you develop your own media strategy.

### Step 1: Select a leader to be in charge of developing and executing your media strategy.

This is extremely important! Most plans fail because no one is in charge of them and no one is responsible for success! The leader should:

- **Earn the trust of the organization and its leadership, and be empowered to take action.** Many media plans are executed poorly because the media manager and leader are not on the same page.
- **Be enthusiastic.** If you are excited about the possibilities of a strong media strategy, then you are more likely to succeed. This excitement shows that you are willing to engage the media. It also demonstrates your willingness to acquire the basic strategic and tactical tools needed to establish a media presence over a period of time. Most media efforts suffer because no one is all that excited about them in the first place. They eventually become a low priority and disappear.

### Step 2: Establish and review your policy and action goals.

Your media strategy starts with your policy goals: **What do you want your community leaders and residents to do?**

You then build your media strategy to support your policy goals. The more specific your policy or action goals, the more powerful your media strategy will be because you have clear, specific, understandable stories to tell through the media.

Here's what might help:

Make a list of all your Walkable Community ideas and prioritize. You may have a dozen great ideas, but for your media strategy, focus on one or two big ideas. Remember, your media strategy is a plan to tell stories over time, not provide lists of policy items.

To help coordinate and reinforce media and policy strategy, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services has provided Walkable Community materials to the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, which offers education and training for elected officials, community leaders, and managers in nearly all of Wisconsin's 599 cities and villages. The League has a monthly magazine, extensive website resources, and a library for local officials to conduct more thorough research on both walkability and bikeability infrastructure strategies.



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- If you are promoting Walkable Communities in your area, the League is important because city leaders and managers will go there to research best practices, potential funding sources, and how-to information.
  - The League is also a great place for you to help coordinate your policy and media strategies. What other cities have done this in Wisconsin? How did they talk about it to the media?
  - Finally, the League is a highly credible authority that the media can rely on to verify your stories. That is an important component for a strong media strategy.

### Step 3: Establish media goals and build your strategic plan.

A media strategy isn't one story in the newspaper. It's a long-term plan to work with reporters and editors over time to help build public awareness, help influence individual behavior, and help convince community leaders to take public policy action.

What would you like to see reported in the media? Commented upon? How could the media build support for your Walkable Community objectives?

The plan accomplishes these seven goals:

- 1 Establishes the message platform. The platform consists of three or four basic messages that all Walkable Community media efforts should be built upon (see Step 4).
- 2 Identifies media vehicles in your community that you would like to work with over the next year (see Step 6).
- 3 Lays out a three-month, six-month, and year-long matrix. This lists opportunities to tell your local Walkable Community stories over time. The matrix includes specific media vehicles, sets dates for action, and assigns responsibility for success. Media opportunities in the matrix can include:
  - Community events, such as festivals, health fairs, or community forums.
  - Preplanned or scheduled releases of state or national studies on chronic disease. These include scheduled news stories generated by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), or the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that can be "leveraged" by attaching your local story and telling it to your local media.
  - Submissions of editorials, guest columns, or letters to the editor.
  - News coverage of city/village council and committee meetings at which your proposals are discussed, etc.
  - Stories scheduled from your "story well" of proposed feature stories.
- 4 Identifies a spokesperson or leader.
  - The spokesperson is usually the leader of the organization or effort, but this is not essential.
  - There may be different spokespeople for different aspects of the story. A local doctor may be the spokesperson for a community report on chronic health conditions in your community, for example, while a local banker or business leader may be the best spokesperson for an organized effort to build a new park.



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**5** Identifies challenges.

- Who opposes your effort or is critical of it?
- What are the other challenges? (Funding? Lack of places to expand parks or sidewalks?)

**6** Establishes ready response process.

Not everyone will be supportive of your ideas. Put in place a mini-plan to ensure that all criticisms receive a positive, forward-looking response. The point is to use criticism to your advantage (see letters to the editor on page 27).

**7** Evaluates and lays out reasonable measurements of success or lack of it.

- Has your story been repeated? How many times? By whom?
- Are attitudes changing? Public conversation? City council action/inaction?
- If not, what needs to change? Your message? Your spokespeople? Have you underestimated your opponents?

## **Step 4: Build your messaging platform.**

You know what you want your community leaders to do and you have a strategic matrix of media opportunities to influence opinions and urge them to act. Now you will establish messages and media stories to help show them that your proposed actions are beneficial for your community—and why they should act.

Your media messaging strategic platform is a “triangle.” These three messages should, if possible, be embedded in all communications by you and all your supporters.

**It’s a local problem!** How does chronic disease affect your community? You can use state and national data to extrapolate the impact of chronic disease in your community. This is a powerful message and the source of profound, personal stories, especially in areas of your community with high percentages of health disparities.

**Walking is enormously helpful.** As with the problem, localize the benefits of walking. Extrapolate state and national data to show how increased opportunities for walking would benefit your community. This is also a powerful message and a source of personal stories that speak loudly to areas with those high percentages of health disparities.

**Solutions.** The solutions are both personal messages to encourage walking and community messages to encourage investments in walkability infrastructure. What do you want people to do in your community? What are the infrastructure obstacles to walking in your community—and what solutions are you bringing to the table for discussion? These are all positive, forward-looking messages and stories.



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## Step 5: Build your story library. Identify local stories. Keep your media matrix full—and dynamic.

Walkable community stories, like most health stories, are excellent candidates for local media coverage because chronic disease is universal—and devastating. Reporters favor these stories because they're local with a human, personal face for a devastating social problem—and solutions are both positive and helpful for readers and viewers.

Journalists also favor these stories because, with local help, they can be easily reported.

To provide that help, develop a story library—a list of stories and story opportunities you organize so that journalists have news and feature stories to cover in your community.

For each story you propose to a reporter, line up in advance personal storytellers, expert sources, background materials, and photo opportunities, such as a person with a chronic disease trying to walk in a picturesque park that is difficult to navigate.

This isn't cynical. This is what good organizations do to work with journalists in a positive way on important issues.

### **In general, your stories should include these four qualities:**

- 1 They must be simple. Focus on one big idea. Remember, you're telling a story, not issuing a policy statement.
- 2 They should include a human face with the story, if possible. All good stories are focused on people, not policies or data. For example, if you are focused on an issue such as a busy intersection that is difficult to cross safely, it is important to have the accident and death data. You should also be sure to find a person who is having trouble crossing the street to demonstrate the problem.
- 3 They must be true, understandable, and repeatable. For example, a story can be true, but not understandable.
- 4 For television, they must include persuasive, strong images and background. (No pictures? No story!)

### **Suggested story ideas to help you envision your own local stories:**

- A specialized report on the benefits of walking in your community. This can be achieved by taking national and state data on the benefits of walking and applying it to your community or broadcast market.
- A specialized report on chronic disease in your community—and what you can do about it. These two stories could be a series or complementary stories.
- A localized story on a problem or obstacle to walking that builds support for a specific action, such as the construction of a pedestrian bridge or a dedicated walking path near a busy street. Focus on one individual to tell the broader feature story.
- A press conference to announce the reports. This is a great way to attract TV reporters to report on these issues.
- A review of the possibilities. What are other cities and villages doing to promote walking? Why is this interesting, important, and cost-effective for our community to consider?

Your individual stories will vary widely. The key is to have several stories, not just one, and tell them over time. This will help reinforce the problem of chronic disease and promote various strategies to encourage walking.



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## Step 6: Identify your local media and local journalists.

### Newspapers

Wisconsin has 32 daily newspapers and 190 weekly newspapers. Most also maintain their own websites and electronic news distribution vehicles. Start there. Local newspapers are especially well read and valued by community leaders. Local newspaper stories can generate public conversation in a way that remains unmatched by social or electronic media. There are thousands of websites and dozens of broadcast outlets, but usually only one community newspaper!

To interact with newspapers:

- Identify the local newspapers important to your community. Many smaller communities have a weekly newspaper and also receive a regional daily newspaper.
- Identify the editor and the editorial page editor. For many newspapers, this is the same person. Their names and contact information are usually listed in the newspaper and on their websites. The editor and editorial page editor are in charge of letters to the editor, editorials, and guest columns.
- Identify individual reporters that you feel are most likely to care about health issues and health solutions. Reporters with some health expertise are usually more excited about the story and do a better job of telling it.
- If there is no obvious choice of reporter, the news editor (daily newspapers) will assign the story to a reporter. Small weeklies usually have only one or two reporters. Because they tend to be stretched for time, they will likely be happy to accept story ideas that are local, human, impactful, and easy to cover and write.

### Television

- Most of your communities do not have local television stations. Currently, only seven cities in Wisconsin have television stations. If your community is not within one of these seven cities, you can still work with regional TV reporters who, for the most part, have strong interest in health stories—and solutions to health problems.
- Identify the news director at the stations you select. That person assigns stories to be covered.
- Identify individual TV reporters. Some television stations have a reporter specifically assigned to health issues. If that is the case, contact that reporter directly. Most station websites include individual contact information for this purpose.

### Radio

Access to radio reporters varies wildly by community because there are few local commercial radio stations that employ reporters, and those that do tend to be larger, regional radio stations. However, you will likely be able to identify at least one commercial radio station in your market (or a public/community station) to tell your story. Follow the same protocol as you would with TV.



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## Third-party media

Often overlooked are third-party media vehicles:

- Newsletters published by regional health systems or clinics.
- Newsletters and email blasts from senior citizen groups such as AARP or your local Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). Seniors can be an important audience in your community because most are retired and have time for civic engagement. Additionally, older adults would benefit enormously from a community that is safer and easier to walk in, reducing their reliance on driving for transportation.
- Newsletters published by social and civic organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary, Optimists, and the Chamber of Commerce. All are excellent vehicles for civic engagement **and** public conversation.

## Alternative media

- Among people who are engaged in civic issues, an overwhelming majority are online and receive at least part of their news and public conversation topics over the internet. Newsletters mentioned above are almost always provided electronically on their websites, in addition to chat forums, blogs, etc.
- Who are the influential local bloggers in your community?
- Do the clinics and health systems in your community have active social media platforms for publishing your story?
- Who are the “tweeters” in your community who use Twitter to “re-tweet” and repeat your stories in the community?

## Social media

As you raise your collective voices through your earned media strategy (your strategy to engage local community and regional media)—please remember the important role of social media. Social media provides excellent vehicles to tell your story, repeat your story, target community leaders, and keep your allies and friends networked.

While there are many types of social media platforms, Twitter and Facebook are ideal outlets for sharing earned media and raising awareness.

**A word of caution:** Creating a social media campaign from scratch is time-consuming. A Facebook group would be very useful for planning and networking purposes, but it won't be as effective for spreading the message without considerable investment.

Instead, your first priority should be to mobilize the social media networks that already exist and belong to your partners, allies, and organizations that support you. Your primary role in a social media campaign is to ensure that you are funneling as much credible, shareable information as possible, including the positive traditional media stories your campaign will generate, links to best practices and technical information, and responses to criticism or attack.



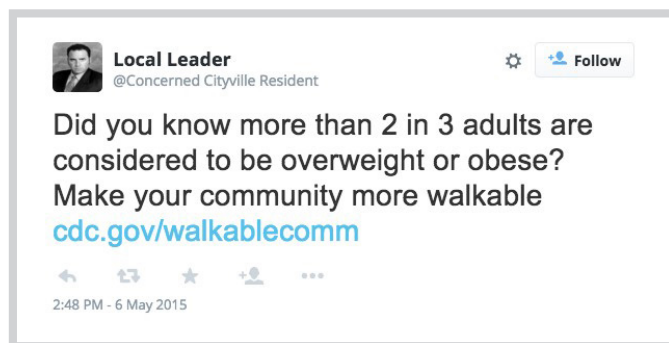
Identify leaders and influential groups on social media who will promote your campaign and get people to act.

#### Examples:



When you identify these leaders and groups, be sure to provide them with information, graphics, and shareables to inform their networks on the campaign.

#### Examples:



For the most part, social media is used to enhance earned media reach. It is an excellent way to repeat your message and make sure key stakeholders see the earned media conversation.

#### Examples:



When posting on Facebook and Twitter, always remember:

- Include a call to action (even if the call to action is "share this information").
- Be consistent (repeat the primary message, as with traditional media).
- Personal narrative is always powerful.
- Engage, don't argue.
- Keep it visual if at all possible.

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## Step 7: Identify third-party champions and ambassadors.

Organizations that successfully work for change rarely do it alone. They work with other groups and other leaders to build coalitions or broad movements to expand their numbers, their influence, and their collective voice.

That is equally true with a media strategy. Your voice is just one call to action through the media. Because there is wide and deep support for Walkable Communities, you likely have hundreds of like-minded people in your community who will help repeat, retell, expand, and reinforce your story.

Who are the credible leaders who support what you are doing and would serve as ambassadors for your story?

For best use of third-party media messaging and support, identify these leaders. Your potential allies could include:

- Health care professionals and health organizations, both public and private.
- Senior citizen groups.
- Organizations that represent and provide services to areas or populations in your community with high percentages of health disparities. These organizations are on the ground working with people in need and their voices can be extremely powerful in public discussion because they see problems and solutions on a personal and neighborhood level.
- Civic and community support organizations.
- Cities with strong historical societies interested in preserving their historic downtowns and making them more attractive.
- Environmental groups and land-use planning organizations. These groups are strongly supportive of Walkable Community efforts in Wisconsin, and their members usually consist of community leaders and influencers.

Build a plan to energize each group or leader. Assign tasks and responsibilities, such as submitting letters to the editor or participating in a press conference.

Keep them networked. Keep it positive and forward-looking!

Provide each group or leader with “messaging” materials so that every ambassador has a story that is consistent and reinforces the overall messaging and policy goals (the message platform). Each group may bring a different perspective to the community discussion, but the message platform is the same, including the call to action.



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## Step 8: Build collateral materials.

These are the physical materials you'll produce as you work with the media and send them information that entices them to be interested in your stories—and tell them (see the included examples and templates).

### A press release

This is a “framing document.” It's a brief version of the news story about your effort that you would like to see in the newspaper or have broadcast. Until you actually submit it for publication or broadcast, it is a document that helps everyone in the effort understand your central story and message—as well as how to talk about it.

**Suggestion.** Write a release that truly offers news to reporters. A coffee gathering is not news. The announcement of a new walking program is a good, local, weekly newspaper story. The formation of a group to push for walking bridges over highways is a good regional media story. Do not assume that local newspapers will run anything you give them. They will not—and you risk wasting a reporter's time or, worse, not being taken seriously in the future.

### A fact sheet

This is a public document that also doubles as an internal document. (You can find basic documents later in the Toolkit)

- What are the facts about chronic disease in our community?
- What are the facts about the benefits of walking in our community?
- What are the personal and infrastructure obstacles to walking in our community?
- What infrastructure changes or investments have been considered in the past that still make sense?
- What best-practice infrastructure options could our community discuss?

### Background information (it will vary by issue or policy goal)

These are more complete background materials for leaders who want to educate themselves more fully. For the benefits of walking, for example, you could provide the U.S. Surgeon General's report on Walkable Communities, which is extremely comprehensive.

### An opinion piece

This is a 550-word guest column (or op-ed) that fully lays out your organization's call to action. You have complete control over the message, and, if written concisely and thoughtfully, almost all newspapers would agree to print it.



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## Sample letters to the editor

These 200- to 250-word letters are excellent vehicles to “continue the conversation” through local newspapers. They use many voices, they multiply your message, they are generally easy to write and submit, and newspapers are conscientious about printing good letters from local citizens.

- Identify third parties willing to write letters and offer sample letters.
- Assign them different perspectives for their letters so that each is slightly unique, but still reinforces the broader messages.
- Make sure they are “on call” so your organization can respond quickly and overwhelmingly to feedback.

## Step 9: Evaluation

Keep track of the stories, editorials, and letters that have been written, published, broadcast, and shared online. Meet once per month to discuss progress or lack of it.

- This will enable you to determine whether your story is truly affecting public conversation and attitudes.
- A monthly meeting also serves as a brainstorming session for new story, media tactic, and public relations ideas. For example, an event such as a community walkathon generates public awareness, support, **and** media attention.
- Plan for the next month. Almost all good organizations have three- and six-month plans. But they can be broad. The best plans are updated monthly as new circumstances, opportunities, and challenges arise.
- Be honest. If it’s not working, it’s important to know why—and adjust.

*As you collect and itemize these stories, make sure all community leaders see everything you collect so you are certain the media you generate reaches them. Send a weekly update or even a monthly package of clips.*

*Community leaders truly care about public opinion—media coverage and conversation is frequently the strongest indicator of public support.*





**Walkable  
Communities  
Media Advocacy  
Toolkit**

**2**

**Fact Sheet**



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**Note to coalitions:** Where possible, do the best you can to localize these data points for your media materials. Be sure to note that these are estimates, however. Exaggerating numbers or making false claims will hurt your credibility with media.

### **Why we're promoting our Walkable Community**

Chronic disease in our community—and in America—is the leading cause of death and the single largest factor in driving up health care costs. Nearly half of all adults suffer from some form of chronic disease, and almost half of them suffer from more than one, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Walking 30 minutes a day, five days a week adds 1.3 to 1.5 years to a person's life on average, reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes, and depression.

For every minute people walk, they get three back. People who live in Walkable Communities are 2.5 times more likely to walk 30 minutes, according to the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Walking also helps people reduce weight. According to the CDC, residents in walkable neighborhoods weigh six to ten pounds less than those in areas where walking is difficult. That's potentially important for Wisconsin, where two-thirds of adults are overweight and one-third are obese. One in six Wisconsin children ages 10-17 are also overweight or obese.

Neighborhoods with walkable facilities, schools, and stores are successful in promoting health. According to the *American Journal of Public Health*, residents of walk-friendly communities get 70 extra minutes of physical activity per week and are 40 percent less likely to be overweight or obese than residents of neighborhoods with few walkable facilities.

Walking is a highly recommended exercise for seniors, as it is safe and can be done at an individual pace. Among people over 60, a new National Institute of Health study shows walking helps improve physical and cognitive well-being.

Walking is, in some ways, the perfect exercise. It requires no special equipment or facilities and anyone can do it: the elderly, people with physical challenges or disabilities, children, groups of friends, etc.

Investments in Walkable Community projects also produce strong economic returns because people like living and doing business in them. A number of studies show walkable neighborhoods have significantly higher home values, and walkable downtown urban areas tend to attract more business and hotel investment per square mile.





**Walkable  
Communities  
Media Advocacy  
Toolkit**

**3**

**Media Guide**



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## Know Your Stuff

### Who is interviewing you?

Familiarize yourself with the reporter.

### Gather your facts.

Talk to experts. Find data that strengthens your position.

### Craft a “sound bite.”

Make it colorful and pithy so reporters can’t help but use it.

### Anticipate then practice.

There are three kinds of questions: challenging, unusual, and questions you’d love to respond to if only someone would ask you. Write down concise responses, then practice your delivery.

## Stay on Message

### Think through your goal.

What do you want out of this interview? Are you sharing information and establishing yourself as a credible source? Are you trying to build support for a particular program?

### Organize your position.

What are your three or four strongest points? Design your message using these points. Avoid information overload. Simple is best.

### Repeat and repeat again.

Messages only work if they are repeated...often. Come back to your message if a reporter goes off in another direction. Strict discipline ensures your message will be covered.



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## Put Your Best Foot Forward

### **Be memorable.**

Don't shy away from sounding passionate and repeating your points—the more memorable your points, the more likely they are to stick.

### **Build your verbal skills.**

Be refreshingly candid, but positive. Master bridging back to your topic through practice. Become a storyteller; it's one of the most powerful communication tools available.

### **Bridge to where you want to be.**

Focus on your goal, then bridge to the “question you'd love to respond to if only somebody would ask you.” Or in the event of a hostile question, bridge out of trouble by deflecting with humor or steering discussion back to your main goal.

### **Focus on content.**

Good answers are memorable and meaningful and always circle back to the greater message. You're the only one who has ultimate control over your answer, so make it count!

### **Power your way forward—quickly and effectively.**

Use positive, declarative language. Avoid emotionally charged words typically used by reporters—they instill a negative feeling. Instead focus on brief responses that use power words.





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Media Advocacy  
Toolkit**

**4**

**Writing a News Release**



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News releases are an efficient way to tell your Walkable Community story quickly to a maximum number of reporters and news directors. Stay focused! What is new about your proposal? Who is involved? And why is it important to your community? A news release is a five- to six-paragraph summary of your story. It frames how you'd like the media to view your proposal. It also frames your story for your organization's members.

Here's a simple guide:

**Gather facts:** What are the benefits of a Walkable Community for your community (see fact sheet)? What are the obstacles? How does your proposal help overcome those obstacles?

**Assign a spokesperson:** It doesn't have to be the leader of the organization; the person who speaks on behalf of your effort is the face and voice of that effort.

**Construct a headline:** A headline is a short declarative sentence or partial sentence designed to capture attention to your news announcement or event.

**A strong lead:** Grab the reporter's attention. Compel them to read further. Short and to the point is best.

**Draft two or three supporting paragraphs:** Briefly summarize your main points. Personalize the story. Keep sentences simple and direct. And remember—this is not a report!

**Review release:** Is it consistent with the message you are trying to convey to your audience? Did you clutter the article with too much information? Did you use jargon that will confuse your readers?

**Contact information:** Include the name and phone number of a contact person who will be available to speak with reporters on the subject of the release.

**Distribute news release:** Fax, personally deliver, or email the release to the media. Releases about upcoming events should be sent out several days before the event and followed up with a reminder advisory or a phone call the day before the event.





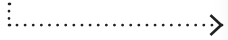
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**5**

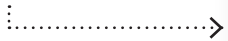
**News Release Sample**



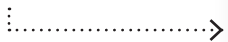
**CONSTRUCT A  
HEADLINE**



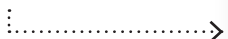
**STRONG LEAD**



**ASSIGN A  
SPOKESPERSON**



**GATHER FACTS**



For Immediate Release: (INSERT DATE)

Contact: (INSERT NAME, PHONE NUMBER)

**Walkable group launches “Healthy Cityville” effort**

CITYVILLE -- A citizen’s group representing a wide swath of Cityville residents and business leaders today announced a plan they say will make Cityville residents healthier and make the city a better place to live, work, and invest by making the city more walkable.

“Healthy Cityville’s” plan is a 15-year program of investment in the community to make it easier and more enjoyable to walk, a simple exercise that other cities have found can have a dramatic effect on people’s health—and encourage new business investment. The group will propose its plan Tuesday to the city council.

“We live in a city designed for cars, not people,” explained Healthy B. Advocate, who chairs the 40-member citizen group consisting of senior citizens, business leaders, school administrators, and law enforcement officials. “That means it is difficult, if not impossible, to walk places as part of our daily lives. That is a key reason why our society is overweight and why chronic diseases such as diabetes are so pervasive.”

The group’s proposal would expand the sidewalk system, encourage businesses to locate more retail and services in the historic downtown area, and construct two pedestrian bridges that would enable citizens to safely cross First and Maple Streets.

The effort is part of a statewide and national effort to create community cultures that encourage walking. Studies show that people who walk a half hour a day add as much as 1.5 years to their life spans because it lowers their chances of stroke, type II diabetes, and enables them to lose weight.

Communities that have invested in walkable programs and infrastructure have also found that residential and downtown areas conducive to walking also see home values rise and an upturn in investment in new businesses and housing.

“Walkable communities are healthier. Their citizens are healthier and their economies are healthier,” Advocate said. “This won’t happen overnight. But we need to think big, and we need to get started. This isn’t about today’s citizens. It’s about the future of our children and the future of our city.”





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Media Advocacy  
Toolkit**

**6**

**Writing a Letter to the Editor**



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Letters to the editor are an extremely effective way to repeat our message. Here are the basic principles of a good letter:

**Repeat the primary message.** The goal is to repeat our central message that Walkable Communities are in the community's best interest for health, economic, and quality of living reasons.

**Stay positive.** Don't attack or respond to attacks. Acknowledge an attack only as a vehicle to repeat your positive message. Remember, an attack or criticism is an opportunity to repeat and repeat your positive message!

**Keep them short.** Many daily newspapers have a 250-word limit. That's a pretty good guide for all letters as that's about as much as readers will digest in a letter to the editor.

**Keep it as local as possible.** Refer to the local situation instead of using statewide statistics on chronic disease or the benefits of walking. Use local statistics if you have them. The author should be local—and any references to local people or groups is an effective way to ensure newspapers will use your letter.

**Short paragraphs.** You may not have noticed, but newspapers use one- and two-sentence paragraphs. They do this because the columns are narrow. Large paragraphs turn into large blocks of gray type.

**Write simply. Write as you speak.** Write a draft off the top of your head just as you would thank someone in person. Walk away. Reread it later. Edit it and send it in.

**Just do it, and encourage others.** The most difficult part of letter writing is getting it done and into the paper. Letters not written do not get in the paper.





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**7**

**Letter to the Editor Samples**



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## SAMPLE 1

Dear editor,

To the gentleman who protested last week that sidewalks are a waste of money, I would like to point out that they are actually an excellent investment.

But we need to do this right in order to maximize that investment. And that's what we are proposing.

Our "Healthy Cityville" task force last week announced our effort to complete our city's sidewalk system so that sidewalks reach our two city parks and our downtown shopping area. For a relatively small investment of \$100,000, we can have a sidewalk system that makes it far easier to walk to several key destinations in our city.

The gentleman may not use sidewalks. He's not alone—and that's the point.

Chronic disease is the number one killer in our city. It's the single largest contributor to driving up health care costs nationwide. Our city, like many in Wisconsin, contributes to the problem because it is designed for cars instead of people.

If we want people to be healthier, we need a city that encourages our young, our seniors, our working families, and everyone to walk. Our proposal is a step toward making XXX a healthier, better place to live.

And by any measure, that's a great investment.

Sincerely,

Bob Smith

Chairman, Healthy Cityville

## SAMPLE 2: Using thanks to repeat your story.

To the editor,

We would like to thank our city council for considering our plan to make Cityville a healthier place to live—and a nicer place to live at that!



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To the editor,

We would like to offer our appreciation for your Tribune reporter, Jason Smith, who did a professional job in capturing the essence of our proposal to make our city a better, healthier place to live. Our plan isn't complicated, but there are many complicated details, and Smith did an excellent job of getting them right, including why we feel it's a good investment for taxpayers.

### **SAMPLE 3: Responding to newspaper error or "unfair coverage."**

Dear editor,

We respect the fact that there is opposition to our plan to make Cityville a more walkable community, as you reported in Sunday's story, but we would like to add to the conversation because the story may have left the impression with readers that opposition to our plan is deep and widespread.

We have found the opposite. In our discussions with city leaders, surveys of our community service organizations, and even folks in coffee shops, we have received nothing but strong support.

And for good reason. [EXTOL THE BENEFITS.]

That doesn't mean our plan is perfect or that it can't be improved. It certainly can be—and we are looking forward to further debate and discussion.





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Media Advocacy  
Toolkit**

**8**

**Writing an Op-Ed**



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The op-ed is a vehicle to fully craft your argument for publication on the editorial page of your daily or weekly newspaper. Newspaper editors will allow columns of up to 550 words, which must be accompanied by your name and your contact information (so they can ensure you're a real person).

To help ensure a newspaper editor will accept your column, here are some tips:

**Keep it local.** That means a local opinion by a local writer discussing local issues such as Walkable Communities is a national and statewide issue so it has local news value and broad news value.

**Tell human stories.** Use examples that include stories about local people to help illustrate your point. Data points are boring. People are interesting.

**Call to action.** Address the local problem you are trying to solve and the challenges you face. A strong column offers solutions. What is it you want leaders to do? How does it benefit the community?

**Stay focused.** Avoid name-calling and personal grievances with, say, someone opposed to Walkable Communities. Stay focused. Don't waste space arguing minor points. Personal accusations rarely earn newspaper space.

**Use journalistic style.** Newspapers use narrow columns so they require one- and two-sentence paragraphs. Use strong, active verbs and precise nouns. Make sure your facts are accurate and your words are spelled correctly. Editors are busy. If they have to spend time cleaning up your writing or checking facts, they won't likely bother. They'll delete them.





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Toolkit**

**9**

**Op-Ed Sample**



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By Health B. Advocate

My spirited 70-year-old neighbor Marge laughs when she reflects on how poorly she's aging. She blames herself for being overweight, having poor eyesight and balance, and for her daily endurance of new aches and pains.

Yes, she says, she should have eaten better, exercised more, and perhaps passed on a few more beers and cocktails. Shouldn't we all?

We at our "Healthy Cityville" coalition don't fully agree with Marge. We think our community could be a much healthier place for everyone by making Cityville more walkable. If Marge had been walking half an hour each day for the last 10 years, studies show she almost certainly would have added years to her life.

In fact, studies show that walking at a brisk pace on a daily basis can add up to seven years to life expectancy. Additionally, regular walkers experience fewer strokes, weigh less, and are less likely to develop type II diabetes. As we age, walking even improves physical and cognitive well-being.

The problem for Marge—and for all of Cityville—is that it's hard to walk here.

Our lifestyles are dictated in part by the community we live in. Like most American communities, ours was designed over time almost exclusively for cars.

If you want to live and thrive in Cityville, you have to drive here.

If you want to walk...well, good luck.

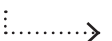
Marge doesn't walk regularly because she lives in a three-bedroom, one-bathroom home near the busy intersection of Maple and First Streets. There is a marked pedestrian crossing, but with her bad eyesight and slow gait, she would risk serious injury if she attempted to beat the light, let alone dodge cars turning onto Maple Street.

Like most communities, walking was never really part of the community plan—at least as far as anyone can remember. We have entire sections of the community with no sidewalks or incomplete, broken ones. We have no walking paths, except for one in the park, which is on the edge of town and people have to drive to reach.

But even if we had fine sidewalks, it would still be unrealistic for people to walk anywhere useful as part of their daily routine because most of our retail and service centers are located on the edge of town where available land allowed them to build big. Even our library and schools are located fairly far from almost everyone who lives here.

So we drive. As Marge looks back on her life, she can't remember a day in which she walked anywhere to shop, visit the doctor, or go to church.

PAGE 2



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We can change the future, maybe not for Marge, but certainly for Cityville and for our children. Here are the Walkable Community proposals we will be making to the city council tomorrow night:

- Two pedestrian bridges over First Street, our major thoroughfare. This wouldn't just be nice, it would be good for business as we have a lot of retail on the north side of the avenue that requires driving.
- A dedicated walking path along the river. It's our most beautiful asset linking the park to the old downtown. Why wouldn't we do this?
- Dedicating walking corridors and sidewalks to be required in all new developments.

Walkable Communities aren't just good for health, by the way. They are a good financial investment. Building walkable neighborhoods raises housing values, attracts businesses and business investment, and brings professionals to our city.

Cityville has great potential to be a walkable, healthy city. Let's get to it!





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Communities  
Media Advocacy  
Toolkit**

**10**

**Media Alert**



A typical media alert is sent to all reporters and editors you think may be interested in an event you organize, such as a press conference, a rally, or even a major presentation to the city council. (NOTE: It is NOT a press release. So save your news for the event. Otherwise, why would media attend? The goal of the alert is to get media attention and encourage them to attend.)

The alert includes:

- **Letterhead for your organization.** If you don't have letterhead, design it. It adds credibility and authority to your organization.
- **Date.** Immediate! This is news!
- **Contact information.**
- **The basics.** Who, what, when, where, and why.

## Media Alert

DATE, 2016

For more information, contact:

XXXXXXX Local coordinator, leader and title

Contact: Email, cell phone number



**ATTN: News editors, reporters, assignment editors**

**Press Conference: A plan to make (our community) healthier!**

What: (NAME OF COMMUNITY)'s local Walkable Communities coalition will make a major announcement XXXXX regarding a new plan to make our community more walkable, livable, and more healthy.

Who: Local leader, local expert

Why: Our community is designed for people who drive to work, play, and shop. By investing in ..... we can make ..... a healthier community simply by making it easier to walk to work, to stores, and to our recreation spots.

When:

Where:

###



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**11**

**Sample Talent Release Form**



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## Talent Release

I hereby give (ORGANIZATION NAME) and its assignees, licensees, and legal representatives the irrevocable right to use my name or any fictional name, likeness, picture, portrait, photograph, audio, or video recording.

Further, I relinquish, and give to (ORGANIZATION NAME) all rights, title, and interest I may have in the finished picture, negative, audio, and video recordings, reproductions and copies of the original prints, negatives, and recordings.

In giving this consent, I release the above organization and their nominees and designees from liability for any violation of any personal or proprietary right I may have in connection with such sale, reproduction, or use.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name PLEASE PRINT

### CONSENT (required if under 18 yrs.)

I am the parent or legal guardian of the minor named to the left. I have read this release, am fully familiar with its contents, and have the legal authority to execute this release.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City

\_\_\_\_\_  
State

\_\_\_\_\_  
ZIP

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

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Parent or Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date





**State of Wisconsin**

**Department of Health Services**

**Chronic Disease Prevention Program**

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/disease/chronic-disease.htm>

**Mary Pesik, Unit Supervisor**

Email: [Mary.Pesik@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Mary.Pesik@dhs.wisconsin.gov)

608-267-3694

