

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant Project Focus, Components, and Activities

The project applies three interrelated public engagement programs from Cape Town, South Africa: Open Streets, Talking Streets, and StreetLab. Open Streets are events that temporarily open streets to people by closing them to cars. Talking Streets are organized walking meetings amongst residents, activists, built environment professionals, and others to discuss how a community's streets are designed and function, and how they can be improved. StreetLab is a space for experimentation and learning around urban design policy change. These activities have had __XX__ impact on climate change, health, and equity. While these concepts previously have been used to inform transportation actions only, we propose to expand them to inform neighborhood design and the built environment more broadly. In doing so, we follow best practice in building community resilience to climate change that calls for "hyper local" and community-driven adaptation action.

We will put these three innovative concepts into action in New Haven, Connecticut, a small, diverse New England city of 130,000 residents. Our community engagement efforts will focus on the Edgewood, Dwight, Hill District, and Fair Haven neighborhoods, which run along the spine of Whalley Avenue to Grand Avenue corridor. These four neighborhoods reflect New Haven's ethnic and racial diversity, as well as its deep economic, social, and health disparities. They are predominantly low-income, with disproportionate incidence of poor health outcomes (including asthma, diabetes, obesity, COVID rates) and high reliance on public transportation.

Utilizing the ground-up approach, the City will revisit and inform existing land use and transportation policies, to maximize their public health, health equity, and climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits. Specifically, the public engagement processes will shape the City's Green Ordinances and the Active Transportation Master Plan, with the possibility for additional policy change through coalition-building during the grant period. The project also will support the City's efforts to develop, experiment, and codify new institutional practices of public engagement into its planning processes.

The project's four primary objectives are:

1. Using Talking Streets and Open Streets, facilitate a process to collect and record residents' knowledge about their neighborhood, their perceptions on how the local environment affects their health, and their visions for the future of their neighborhoods
2. Combine the collected community knowledge with spatial data on health outcomes, environmental factors, and climate projections to develop an online mapping tool that educates the public and informs City policy
3. Using StreetLab, convene community residents, civic leaders, and City staff to iteratively generate ideas on green ordinance principles and active transportation plan elements, informed by the mapping tool and additional community engagement
4. Achieve action within the grant period by securing approval by the Board of Aldermen of four new or updated green ordinances, ****TRANSPORTATION OUTPUT****, and updates to City Plan's public engagement procedures

The project addresses the following focus areas: buildings; transportation, land use and urban planning; and climate adaptation/resilience. It engages the urban planning and transportation sectors, with additional connections to the engineering and food policy sectors.

We expect that the project will address the intertwined threats of health, equity, and climate change by changing city planning, policies, and programs in three ways:

Institutionalize inclusive community engagement techniques into city government practices to build equitable community resilience to climate change

Through ground-up and inclusive community resilience planning, there is an opportunity to ensure that those most affected by an issue are empowered to shape the decisions that will impact their lives. The process itself can build resilience by increasing connections between community members — which builds social cohesion — and cultivating community leadership. Our proposed Walking Streets and StreetLab will equip the walk leaders and participants to combine climate change projections and community knowledge into policy solutions and practices that best serve their community's needs. In year 3, StreetLab's Walk Leader members also will deliver recommendations about community engagement best practices learned through the project to city agencies (City Plan, Transportation, others), to be incorporated into city practices.

Codify built environment and urban design changes in 4 green ordinances that address climate threats including the urban heat island effect, urban flooding, and local food security

This project builds on ongoing collaboration between the City of New Haven's City Plan, Food System Policy Division, and Engineering departments to systematically and methodically update a set of Green Ordinances. Planned project outcomes include the update to two existing green ordinances, the Stormwater Management Ordinance and the Reflective Heat Impact Ordinance, and the development of two new green ordinances, the Urban Agriculture Ordinance and the Vacant Lot Policy.

Make active transportation safer and easier, thereby reducing transportation related greenhouse gas emissions, particulate matter, and other air pollutants

Key project activities, timing, and deliverables:

Year 1 (Nov 2020-Oct 2021)

Objective 1: Walking Streets to collect local knowledge

- Develop curriculum for Walking Streets leader training; create Walking Street participant tools, including questionnaires, walking diaries, and discussion prompts
- Recruit and train local residents to lead Walking Streets in their neighborhoods
- In each of 4 neighborhoods: recruit participants, conduct introductory walk ("Show us your neighborhood") and three thematic walks (SPECIFY HERE?)

Deliverables: Curriculum, data & story collection tools, 8 trained resident walk leaders, 16 completed walks

Objective 2: Mapping tool

- Identify initial climate change, health, and demographic GIS data layers with sufficient neighborhood-scale resolution (e.g. surface temperature, impervious surface, access to a vehicle, income, ownership status, asthma rates)
- [Add more based on Mariana's writeup]

Deliverables:

Year 2 (Nov 2021-Oct 2022)

Objective 1: Walking Streets to collect local knowledge

- Transcribe and process qualitative and quantitative data from Year 1's 16 walks
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Deliverables: , transcribed and processed data

Objective 2: Mapping tool

- Process qualitative and quantitative data GIS layers
- Create ESRI StoryMaps

Objective 3: StreetLab policy development

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